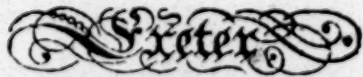


A
S E R I E S
O F
L E T T E R S.

By the Rev. WILLIAM TASKER, A.B.

SECOND EDITION.



PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR, BY R. TREWMAN AND SON.

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1798



P R E F A C E.

IT is hoped that the novelty of the design will be the best excuse for the imperfect execution, in examining the several wounds and deaths in the Iliad, Æneid, and Pharsalia of Lucan, and trying them by the test of anatomy and physiology. This plan (as far perhaps as any can) may be considered as a new one, even in this investigating age. For tho' many gentlemen of the faculty, (in whom a knowledge of their profession and a

taste for poetry, are happily united) have in general admired the great and beautiful variety of wounds and deaths in the Iliad ; yet no one has condescended to examine any particular individual wound or death, by the rules of his art. Indeed since the publication of the second volume, but long since the medical correspondence was concluded ; it was found that Mr. Cruickshank, (that very ingenious Reader in anatomy,) has in some parts of his lectures, delivered some remarks on the anatomical knowledge of Homer ; but as the author of the letters now published, had never the pleasure of attending any one of Mr. Cruickshank's anatomical lectures. If these letters contain any similar sentiment with so great a man, such coincidence of thought must be highly flattering.

The

The Reader will likewise observe, that as the history of the wounds and deaths in the *Iliad* or *Æneid*, have no connexion with the historical narration of the two poems, the instances are adduced from all parts, without order or regularity, as they suited the purpose of the author.

N. B. The Authors ill health, and other embarrassments, are the best excuses for the long delay of this publication.

EXETER, April 24th, 1798.

MISCELLANEOUS

It is a pleasure to have this book
published. The author has been
informed of the interest and
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THE
ANATOMICAL KNOWLEDGE
OF
H O M E R.

LETTER I.

AS you express a desire of forming a correspondence on literary subjects; my love of science, propensity for writing, and retired situation, may perhaps induce me to write as long letters as you may have patience to read. Respecting the subject of our last conversation:—it has been often asserted, that Homer understood anatomy.—Having lately attended anatomical lectures, as delivered by the clearest demonstrator in the known world; I am now reading the Iliad with this particular view.

You may perhaps be a little surprised at first, to find the words used by Homer, expressive of the different parts of the human body, to be nearly the same as Dr. W. Hunter uses in his anatomical demon-

B

strations

strations; but this phænomena is easily resolved, when we consider, that the common language of ancient Greece is now adopted as the scientific in our medical schools. Homer, however, could not have precisely the same learned ideas annexed to the same words; since he could not possibly understand the minutiae of anatomy; the science itself not then existing. And indeed Hippocrates, at a much later period, had little knowledge of the component parts of the human body under dissection, further than the bare skeleton. But the divine poet, in this matter, as in every thing else, copied from nature; and has in a wonderful manner diversified the wounds and deaths of his heroes; describing them in such a manner, that he renders his readers almost spectators. Every wound, that in its own nature is mortal, is generally described as such; and, no chief ever makes a speech, when expiring, unless his wounds admit of that privilege. There is scarcely a single instance to the contrary in the whole Iliad; as you will find, if you read the original Greek; though I am sorry to observe, that there are many very glaring ones in Pope's (otherwise beautiful) translation; or as it may with more propriety be termed modernization

tion of one of the most antient poems now in being. Pope somewhere observes, that Homer is rather too critically nice in these respects. As a translator, however, he has sufficiently obviated this objection by his own practice; though, in his Essay on Homer's Battles, he very ingeniously remarks, "that Homer has varied these deaths by the several postures in which his heroes are represented, either fighting or falling; some of which he says (as every other person must say) are so exceedingly exact, that one may guess, from the very position of the combatants, whereabouts the wound will light; others, he says, are so peculiar and uncommon, that they could only be the effect of an imagination, which has searched through all the ideas of nature; and such is the posture of Medon, in the 5th Book, whose arm being numbed by a blow on the elbow, drops the reins that train on the ground; and then being suddenly struck on the temples; falls headlong from the chariot, in a soft and deep place, where he sinks up to the shoulders in the sands, and is awhile fixed by the weight of his armour, with his legs quivering in the air, till he is trampled down by his horses."

So much for sensible, elegant and judicious Pope! but respecting my humble self, the blaze of poetry, that every where shines and burns throughout the best poems in any language, like the ἀνάμολον πῦρ or the unwearied fire on the Helmet of Diomed, as described in the beginning of the 5th book, dazzles my eyes in the prosaic research that I am now making. However, I can clearly see the beautiful propriety of circumstances and consequences attending every wounded soldier. It may not likewise be improper to consider a little the very imperfect state of medicine at the time of the Trojan war; no medical distinctions were then established; the same men were both surgeons and physicians; as we find exemplified in Podalirius and Machaon, (the two sons of Æsculapius) who acted as surgeons general to the Grecian army. Their simple practice consisted chiefly in extracting darts or arrows, in staunching the blood, by some infusion of bitter herbs, and sometimes they added charms, or incantations; which seemed to be a poetical way of hinting, that frequently wounds or diseases were cured in a manner unaccountable, by any known properties they could discover either in the effects of their rude remedies, or in the then known

known powers of the human body to relieve itself. On perusing the *Odyſſey* (which, though it does not contain the terrible graces, ſublime images, and animation of the *Iliad*, is perhaps equally or more entertaining by the calmer, but not leſs beautiful, pictures of the ſimplicity of the heroic age, and the pleaſant ſcenes of rural and domeſtic life, which it copiouſly exhibits) I perceive in Homer's deſcription of the wound which Ulyſſes, when young, received in his thigh from the tuſk of an enraged wild boar, that the effuſion of blood was ſtopped by incantations or divine Songs, and ſome ſort of bandage which muſt have acted by preſſure. If any verſe could have acted as a charm, the very verſe that deſcribes the wound, might have as good a right to ſuch a claim as any other; but, in what manner the ſurgeons of antient Greece, before the diſcovery of the circulation of the blood, might apply bandages for the purpoſe here mentioned, is not eaſily to be explained; though doubtleſs theſe bandages, muſt have acted like a turnequet, which is now the moſt effectual remedy for compreſſing a wounded artery, and thereby ſtopping an hæmorrhage.

I cannot conclude this letter without obſerving, that the phraſe of "biting the duſt," ſo often applied

to the dying warriors; and what Shakespear's Falstaff humourously calls "grinning honour," is a just, but horrible, picture of nature in her last agonies. Virgil has diversified this phrase in a variety of expressions; but by the addition of "*moriensque; suo se vulnere versat,*" which is so happily expressive of the contortions and writhings of the body from the extreme anguish of a painful wound; he has in this as in some other few instances, evidently improved on his great master.

Yours, &c. &c.

N. B. This letter was written before the death of the late Dr. W. Hunter, with whose friendship the author was honoured, and to whose memory he wishes to pay every tribute of respect.

LETTER II.

Α Ο Ι Μ Ο' Σ,

OR,

THE PESTILENCE in the GRECIAN CAMP.

SIR,

SOME historical writer acquaints us, that a pestilence did actually happen some time during the ten years siege, and the fact is highly probable in itself, for I am bold to conjecture (though such fact had

had not been recorded) that a famine, the usual forerunner of this malady, must in some degree or other have previously existed. This appears pretty clear; for the narrow Isthmus of the Troad (though very fruitful) can never have been any thing like sufficient for supplying so vast an army with provisions, both within and without the walls of Troy. And in further confirmation of this opinion, we find that the Grecians employed the first nine years almost entirely in foraging and plundering the neighbouring countries.

The ancient theory of the plague, may appear in this enlightened age, perhaps, rather more a matter of learned curiosity than of medical improvement,—Thucydides, who so feelingly describes the plague at Athens, gave his opinion that it originated from Æthiopia, whereas we are now informed by some well-authenticated accounts of recent travellers, that it seldom or never exists in the torrid regions. However most of the ancient philosophers affirmed that it was generated from heat and drought; you may remember that the last plague in Portugal succeeded a very dry and hot season; and as it could not be traced from any foreign part, and did not
spread

spread any further in Europe; it was by physicians, entirely attributed to that cause. Hippocrates, as far as I can understand him, seems to describe two sorts of plagues; and the most common he particularizes by the word “λοιμὸς,” the very identical one that Homer makes use of; and tells us, that when it originates from noxious vapours of the earth, it affects animals which feed low on the surface of the ground. But when it is brought with the higher current of the air, birds are first infected; (however, without reflecting on the divine old man of Cos, it is no easy matter to become acquainted with the disorders of the birds that fly wild in the air). The above is the doctrine of the most enlightened sages of ancient Greece, at least soon after the days of Homer. I need not tell you that Greece borrowed her philosophy, her religion, and perhaps even the rudiments of her language from Egypt. Homer is well known to have travelled into that country, and no doubt he studied their hieroglyphics; and, as a poet, availed himself of their allegories.—Let us hear him, who, according to Horace,

Nil molitur ineptè,

speak for himself—

Ἐννῆμας μὲν ἀνὰ στρατὸν ὦχέτο κῆλα θεοῖο·

During

During nine days (in the bold phrase of poetry,) the arrows of the god, viz. the rays of the sun, marched through the Grecian camp: (and agreeably to Hippocrates's idea, we are told in a few verses before, that they first invaded mules and dogs)—in plain English, there were nine hot dry days * successively; most probably accompanied with a continental wind; for dry winds in that part of the world can only proceed from a large tract of land; for did winds set in from the sea, rain or moisture must ensue. That Homer attributed the pestilence to the effects of the sun, is apparent from all circumstances. The Grecian army made their application to Chryses, the priest of Apollo (or the Sun), and concluded their lustrations, and religious supplications, with a sacrifice to the same deity.

You are a much better geographer than myself, but as well as I recollect, (for I write every thing from memory, having few or no books to consult in this retired situation) Smyrna, the constant seat of the plague at this time, on the coast of Asia, is

* What pestilential effects may be produced by such a wind, is clearly proved by the deadly effects of the syrocco wind, which comes over the dry hot sandy deserts of Africa.

nearly

nearly in the same latitude, and not very far distant from antient Troy. There is a stigma annexed to the plague, like that of the lues venerea, which every country is ashamed to acknowledge to have originated from itself. However, for many reasons, I am inclined to believe, that the plague originated from the soft and luxurious regions of Asia, or Egypt itself. And from the close analogy between the vegetable and animal world; as blights from easterly winds destroy prospects of fruits on trees in this kingdom, I think the fashionable doctrine that animalculæ are the cause of the plague, highly probable; though, the doctrine is by no means new, since it was adopted many years ago, by both an Italian and a French physician; who, like Linnæus, were inclined to impute many disorders to these invisible corporeal agents. However, it is enough for my present purpose to add, that the above circumstances mentioned in the Iliad were likely to produce the effect which Homer describes.

As he was a good anatomist for the times in which he lived; it is my real belief, that in those countries, through which he travelled, he acted in the two-fold capacity of bard and physician; and I

am

am the more confirmed in this opinion, from the consideration that such itinerent practitioners of medicine are, even to this day, not uncommon in those very regions, through which Homer travelled at so early a period.

P O S T S C R I P T.

ON more particular enquiry, it appears, that, from whencesoever the plague may have originated, Constantinople is at present the grand nursery for its propagation; where it is almost always prevalent, like the small-pox and measles in London, Paris, and other large and populous cities. And this unhappy circumstance is in a great measure to be attributed to the Mussulmen being so infatuated by the doctrine of fatality; that they make no scruple to sell the cloaths of the deceased by public auction; and thereby seem to set more value upon an old coat, than upon a young and healthy subject. It is said, (as might be reasonably expected) that the plague is most rife in Constantinople in the summer season; whereas, it is a little extraordinary, that it should spread most during the winter months in Egypt; where it is generally epidemic once every

four

four or five years : and, if I remember rightly, generally abates, or entirely goes off, at the season the Nile over-flows, which happens generally in the spring, or beginning of summer. It is likewise reported that the plague is so far like the small-pox or measles, that the same people seldom have it more than once. If this fact be true, it is a strong confirmation of J. Hunter's doctrine, that the stimuli of most poisons, lose in a great measure, their effect, after the constitution has been habituated to them. In what manner the Jew or Armenian physicians, resident at Constantinople, (for the Turks have none of their own,) treat this malady, I have never been informed. But it seems highly probably that the Peruvian Bark (if taken in season) might be as effectual, as it is found to be in other malignant fevers. And as the plague has been epidemic in London, since the discovery of that noble medicine ; it seems wonderful that instead of the old absurd method of bleeding, the sagacity of Sydenham should never have led him to the application of it in this most malignant disease ; and more particularly so, since it is apparently remitting, if not strictly inter-mitting.

LETTER

LETTER III.

AGAMEMNON's WOUND.

SIR,

I Continue to write to you, without any regular order, concerning (if such an expression may be allowed) the Homeric wounds; and you are now referred to that of Agamemnon, in the 11th Book, which, in my humble opinion, is a strong proof of my assertions in a former letter, in more points than one. Homer, as you may remember, found it absolutely necessary in this book, to describe the Grecians flying from the Trojans; and, to save the honour of his countrymen, he contrived to wound some of his first-rate heroes in such a manner as might oblige them to retire from the fight, but not endanger their lives. Accordingly he narrates, that Coön, a Trojan warrior, darted (*ἀκόντισε*) unperceived at Agamemnon, and hit him, *κατὰ χεῖρα μέσσην*, on the middle of the hand, under the ancon, or elbow:

C

and

and that the point of the shining dart came out at the opposite side.

The thrilling steel transpierc'd the *brawny* part,
And thro' the *arm* stood forth the barbed dart.

POPE.

Read a few lines further, and you will perceive how the original is a picture of nature, and how the translation is otherwise. Homer says, that Agamemnon continued fighting while the warm blood flowed from the wound; but when the wound was dry, and the blood stopped, as Pope in that place beautifully translates,

Then grinding tortures his strong bosom rend,
Lefs keen the darts the fierce Ilythia send.

The Ilythia, you well know, were the Goddesses that presided over child-birth. In plain English, therefore, when from the lacerated tendons of the hand, irritation took place, he felt pains equal to a woman in travel. Whereas, from Pope's description, the Generalissimo of the Grecian army would have been effectually maimed in his arm, but no violent or painful symptoms would have followed from the division of a muscular part. In proof of the irritation that must ensue from the wound described, you may recollect that that horrible symptom,

tom, the lock-jaw, does very often follow from wounds in the hands and feet, in hot climates; and sometimes even in ours.

You, who are such a master of the Greek language, need not be told that $\chi\tilde{\epsilon}\rho$, derived from the old Greek verb $\chi\tilde{\omega}$, to hold, is very unequivocal, and is the appropriated word for 'hand,' in all Greek writers. I am therefore surprized to find, that in the Latin prose translation affixed to Clarke's most judicious and accurate edition of Homer, it should be rendered 'brachium;' the Greek word for arm is $\beta\rho\alpha\chi\iota\omega\nu$, from which the Latins formed their 'brachium.' Further, the Author puts this meaning out of all dispute, in these following words, in another part of the Iliad.

$\chi\epsilon\iota\rho\acute{\iota}\ \delta'\ \epsilon\lambda\omega\nu\ \epsilon\pi\acute{\iota}\sigma\tau\epsilon\ \beta\rho\alpha\chi\iota\omega\nu\alpha$ ——

Clarke, in his preface, tells us, that some part of the Latin prose-translation was his own; and that some parts underwent his corrections, I do him the honour to suppose that this part was neither the one nor the other. In all probability the error in the translators proceeded from their not considering that the hand was capable of being turned in all directions, so that the point of the dart might natu-

rally come out in the direction of the elbow; but at any rate, as it appears beyond all dispute, that it must have gone through the hand, I think the difficulty, if any, may easily be removed in another way; for one of the bones of the arm, (ulna) was by some Greek writers called ancon; and as the conjunction of this and the radius form the carpus, we may suppose that by the dart's coming out under the ancon, may be meant under the wrist. But of those two opinions

Utrum horum mavis, accipe.

P. S. Since the above letter was written, I find, on a perusal of Lord Monboddo's volumes, that his Lordship thinks that Clarke sometimes mistakes the sense of Homer. Whether he has or has not mistaken the passage in question, I could wish to appeal to Monboddo himself, Parr, or the celebrated Greek Professor of Cambridge: and for the anatomical propriety of Agamemnon's wound, I could wish to refer to J. Hunter,* Sheldon, or Cruickshank, and other eminent anatomical surgeons of the age.

* J. Hunter was living when the first edition was published.

LETTER

LETTER IV.

THE DEATH - WOUND

OF

SARPEDON AND HECTOR.

SIR,

WERE you an undertaker, instead of a practitioner of medicine, I would endeavour to treat you with a rich repast, no less than the funerals of two heroes—a son of Jove, and the godlike Hector. Jupiter is said to have honoured the death of his son with some prodigies; and Homer, following the example of his supreme deity, has rendered the death somewhat wonderful; though all within the verge of poetical probability; but his translator has rendered it miraculous.

According to Homer, Sarpedon, that amiable champion in the Trojan cause (almost the only hero whose morals were perfect, and who really deserved the epithet “*ἀμύμων*, blameless,” often promiscuously

bestowed upon some others) was mortally wounded by Patroclus.

—ἐνθ' ἄρα τε φρένες ἑρχάται ἀμφ' ἀδινόν κῆρ.—IL. B. xvi.

“Where the præcordia surround the dense heart:”

I think the nerve of the diaphragm is called the phrenic—a proof that the diaphragm was considered as a part of the præcordia, or φρένες: φρήν, (a primitive noun) in the singular number signifies mind—whereas, φρένες, in the plural, is a little ambiguous! sometimes retaining its primitive sense, and sometimes (as it most undoubtedly does in this place) signifying the parts about the heart. Attend to the translation.

—Patroclus' never-erring dart,

Aim'd at his breast, it pierc'd a mortal part,

Where the *strong fibres* bind the solid heart.

By these *strong fibres* can be meant nothing but the component parts of the heart; for the pericardium that surrounds it is by much too slender a membrane to admit of such a description; so that here you perceive the spear (according to Pope) is infixed in the heart itself.

Much has been said and written concerning the powers of that noble muscle; but its physiology is not even yet perfectly known, nor its powers perfectly

fectly ascertained. I have heard a story, apparently well authenticated, of some anatomist dissecting an old soldier, on the surface of whose heart there was a visible cicatrix, or scar, and consequently there must have been a previous wound.—Shakespeare says, “when the brains were out, the man would die;” and I am taught to believe, that when the heart is pierced through, the man cannot live even a minute; whereas Sarpedon, after receiving his death-wound makes a speech, short indeed, but as collected as any in the whole Iliad, and every way worthy his celestial parent. Homer adds further, that when Patroclus extracted the spear, the præcordia followed or were extracted together with it; and that immediate death ensued.

Proceed we next to the Death-wound of Hector; (he and Sarpedon were ever two of my favourite heroes. I admire the terrible Achilles, but do not like him.) You shall be troubled with no more Greek quotations in this letter; but referred to the passage itself.

This death-wound, in my opinion, is very naturally and anatomically described, both in the original and in the translation. I have now no leisure to
be

be particular. According to Homer, the Pelian spear penetrated the throat, (where there is the quickest* passage for the soul, from the effusion of blood; for one or both of the carotid arteries, and jugular veins, must be divided in consequence of such a wound;) but did not divide the wind-pipe, consequently did not deprive the unfortunate son of Priam of the power of making that pathetic-heroic speech, which he is said to have delivered; capable indeed of affecting every heart, but that of the inexorable son of Peleus.—Pope has well rendered this passage throughout, and happily preserved the peculiar circumstance alluded to.

Nor pierc'd the windpipe yet, nor took the power
Of speech, unhappy! from thy dying hour.

Noble Hector! the English Homer has done
thee justice; on thy death at least, and

Peaceful sleep thine and Sarpedon's shade!

O fortunati ambo! si quid—carmina possint,

Nulla dies unquam memori vos eximet avo.

VIRGIL.

* Homer was authorized to make this assertion, on account of the nerves likewise: since the par-vagus, or eighth pair, that supplies the heart itself, (together with some other nerves,) passes very closely by the arteries, so that the division of a nerve, by any sharp instrument, might occasion speedy death, independent of the effusion of blood from wounded arteries or veins.

LETTER

LETTER V.

THE

COMPLICATED WOUND

OF

ÆNEAS.

S I R,

I Follow no order, as I told you at first, respecting the wounds in Homer. In this letter I beg to call your attention back to the 5th Book of the Iliad, as meaning to consult you, on the complicated wound, contusion, and fracture of Æneas; he being very roughly used by Diomedes, who (according to the fashion of the rude heroic age) threw at him a fragment of a rock, which no two men (such as lived in Homer's days) could carry; with this he hit the Trojan prince on the hip, where the thigh-bone is turned into the socket, which, Homer says, men call the cotyle—fractured the socket bone—burst both the tendons—and the rough edge of the stone stripped off the skin.

Where

Where to the hip th' inserted thigh unites,
 Full on the bone the pointed marble lights;
 Thro' both the tendons broke the rugged stone,
 And stripp'd the skin, and crack'd the solid bone.

Pope has here done almost all that any translator, in English rhyme, could do to preserve the sense of the passage: he has, indeed, in rather vague terms, "crack'd the solid bone," without specifying what bone; whereas the original identifies the cotylé, acetabulum, or socket-bone of the Ischium; but he has most correctly rendered *ἄπὸς δ' ἄμφω ῥήξε τεύοντε* "thro' both the tendons broke," hereby preserving (what he seldom elsewhere does) the beautiful distinction of the Greek dual-number; in Clarke's Latin translation, 'ambos dirupit nervos.' Now it is rather unlucky for this interpretation, that, though the Greek word *νεύρον*, signifies promiscuously nerve or tendon, the noun *τεύων*, (theme *τείνω*, to extend) never signifies any thing but tendon, in its strict and proper sense: what sense either Pope or Clarke affixed to these expressions, is nowise clear, or whether they had any precise meaning; and only translated verbatim; but I own it has puzzled me to find out what those tendons are, and where situated.

The

The other circumstances of the wound are clearly and anatomically described.

Now if the admired editor of Homer had any particular meaning by his two nerves, he must manifestly allude to the two crural nerves; viz. the posterior and anterior. But I believe it is now pretty evident, that Homer, in those early days, could have no notion of any such distinction; the nerves being the very last parts that were discovered from anatomy, the bones being the first, and the muscles the next in the order of discovery. From the mention of cotylé, I at first thought Homer might possibly allude to the two ligaments that keep the thigh bone in its socket, viz. the teres, or round ligament, and the capsular; but when we consider that the latter obtained its name from the resemblance of a purse, it can never be expressed by the word tendon. These tendons, therefore, must certainly be the origins or extremities of some muscle; let us then examine all the neighbouring muscles:—If I remember rightly, the biceps cruris rises tendinous by one (its longest portion) from the tuberosity of the os ischium, and by the other from the linea aspera of the os femoris (I dislike the repetition of technical terms when they can be

be avoided, but they are more excusable when addressed to a gentleman of medical science). I am somewhat afraid, however, that the present scientific distinction of the muscles was little known before the time of Galen.—You may remember there are two other little muscles, called by some anatomists *gemini*, *didymi*, or twin-muscles; that are situated near the head of the thigh bone: possibly these twin-muscles may be what Homer means by the two tendons. So much for the injury received:—What shall we say of the cure?

You may observe, that Æneas, after a very short time, returned to the fight as vigorous as ever. Let us consider a minute what was done in such a complicated piece of mischief, from a stone as big, or bigger than a mill-stone.

In the first place the wound is trifling—the contusion extensive—two tendons of some sort or other are ruptured. Hippocrates, in his Aphorisms, tells us that the *νευρον*, (I believe that is the word he uses) when cut through never unites together again: by the word *νευρον* he clearly means a tendon; for he had little or no notion of the nervous system. Yet we now find, by experience, that if the divided extremities

mities of tendons be kept in contact, they do coalesce and re-unite. But this is not the worst of the business in the present case; for the cotyloid cavity is likewise fractured, and that violently too, if I rightly conceive the force of the verb, “*θλάσσει*,” in the original.

In a similar case, I think a consultation of the most eminent surgeons in Europe, could expect little more than to save the life of the patient; with perhaps a stiff joint, an emaciated, contracted, or paralytic limb. Homer never surely described the wound as curable in itself: he knew anatomy and antient surgery too well. During his travels, or perhaps in his own practice, he had seen fractures of this kind, by bruises from heavy stones, in the ancient combats! but as probably he never knew such an injury removed by human means, he very opportunely called in the assistance of superior agents. The mother Goddess first attempted to save her son, and afterwards Apollo himself carried him off in a cloud; placed him in a Temple of his in Troy, and gave him over to the care of Latona and Diana: these Goddesses might be very good nurses; but the speedy cure could be performed by nobody but the God of medicine himself.

LETTER VI.

*(Continuation of the Fifth Book).*WOUND OF VENUS
AND OF MARS.

SIR,

WHAT in the name of wonder have we here?
A Goddess and a God wounded by a mortal!
The God no less than the tremendous Mars, running
away and roaring like a bull-calf, and dolefully *
complaining to father Jove, of a wound inflicted
from the mortal arm of the son of little Tydeus.
You often seem to reflect upon my enthusiasm for
Homer; you now may perceive the imputation is
unmeritted. I must be blinder than the poet him-
self not to see the absurdity of this passage; which,
in my humble opinion, is one of the most exception-
able in the whole Iliad, and which transcends even

* “ ——— ὀλοφνέμενος ——— ”

poetical

poetical probability. Homer nods here, if ever he did, for he tells us that Minerva, the Grecian goddess of discretion, when she opened the eyes of her favourite hero, to discern gods from mortals, restrained him strictly from attempting to wound any of the celestials, except the Goddess of Beauty : whereas, read a little further, and you will perceive that this identical Minerva herself directs the spear of Diomed against the God of War. If this description will not stand the test in a political light, how will it be tolerated in a religious sense? for you will remember, that the bulk of the Grecian people (not their philosophers) actually believed in the existence of a Venus, a Minerva, and a Mars: and worshipped them as existing Deities. It was probably for this reason, that Plato (the poetical philosopher) excluded poets from his common-wealth; and it was from this passage, and some other such, that Homer bears the imputation of making his gods men, and his men gods. Read what I call Diomed's penitential recantation, in his reply to the ambassadors of King Latinus, as beautifully narrated by Virgil; and you will find that Diomed there attributes all the miseries of his life to his rashness in wounding

Venus ; and I cannot help thinking, but that under the person of Diomed, the judicious Virgil tacitly reprobates this outrage of his great master. He nowhere imitates this passage—the most original character, and perhaps the best sustained in the *Æneid*, is that of the “contemptor Divûm Mezentius”—here he had a fair opportunity for imitation, but he never exhibits this “scorner of the Gods,” as endeavouring to encounter with any of them.

Milton likewise, who closely copies, (and sometimes literally translates Homer,) has avoided this absurdity: he has, indeed, with beautiful propriety exhibited the prince of the fallen angels, as wounded by the sword of Michael. This was angel wounding angel ; but he never introduces Adam as attempting to fight with, or to wound an angel ; though Satan, in the 9th Book, seems to entertain a little apprehension from his strength and personal courage, by calling him “foe not formidable.”

I do not pretend to understand the anatomy of gods and goddesses, (as none of them ever died, none of them were ever dissected) but the wounds themselves, as far as I understand them, are naturally enough described: Venus is wounded in
the

the hand, near the wrist, and Mars in the bottom of his belly.

Homer says, the Gods are, ‘ἀναιμόνεις,’ bloodless; but that they have a singular kind of immortal blood, ἄμβροτον αἷμα which he calls ἰχὼρ, that flows from their wounds; but it should seem that the wounds of his gods do not heal spontaneously; for Dioné cures the wound of Venus, and Jupiter orders Pæan (his household surgeon) to cure the wound of Mars, which he did, by applying ‘ὀδυνήφαια φάρμακα,” anodyne medicines.

What shall we say upon the whole of this business? I think it may be asserted, that the poet’s pen, like the spear of Diomed, “μαίνεται ἐν παλαμασι,” rages, or is mad in his hand. I hope, however, that the great God of War, by divine assistance, got free from all ill consequences of his wounds; though if you will excuse a ludicrous idea, I often think that this said wound of Mars, from its situation and some other circumstances, bears some little analogy to the wound of Uncle Toby.

I have very often had occasion to remark Pope’s great inferiority to Homer; but in this whole passage respecting Diomed’s outrage on Mars, he, by a little

happy deviation from the strict sense of the original, has, in my opinion, given a translation greatly superior.

P. S. I am glad to find that my opinion respecting the pair of small muscles, has your sanction. On recollection, these certainly must have been injured by such a contusion, since one or both of these tendons are inserted into the neck of the thigh-bone. You, on the authority of Winslow, call them gemelli; you may perceive that almost every anatomist makes, in some measure, a new distribution of the muscles, and gives them new names. If the fashion continues for half a century, every muscle will have as many names as it has fibres. What will be the end of this innovation? Will not the multiplicity of names distract the mind of the young student, and deter him from the further study of myology? My friend Dr. W. Hunter, in his anatomical demonstrations, reprobated this innovation, which he calls new-christening of the muscles;* is he not in the right?

* Mr. Northmore, in an ingenious Essay lately published, has intimated the propriety of giving the plain English term to every *Bone*, as tending to facilitate the progress of Science: Would not this be equally useful in a description of the *Muscles*?

You

You rather misconceive my meaning, in one part of a former letter; Homer most assuredly never heard of the eighth pair of nerves, or perhaps of any other nerves, in the sense we now understand them: he knew from observation and experience, that any considerable wound in the throat would occasion speedy death. It is my belief, that Homer attributed this to the effusion of blood entirely, though unacquainted with its circulation—he knew facts, and that was sufficient. You know much better than myself, that it is possible for an anatomical surgeon to puncture, with a sharp instrument, some of the nerves that pass along the throat, and occasion speedy death, with very little effusion of blood. I introduced the mention of the nerves, therefore, as a collateral proof that a wound in the throat would make, in Homer's phrase, “a speedy passage for the soul;” but never meant to insinuate, that he knew those nerves or their office.

LETTER

LETTER VII.

MEDICAL KNOWLEDGE

OF

H O M E R.

S I R,

A Propos! Of grief-alleviating medicines!—I must now, however, in one respect, use the liberty that Shakespeare does in the drama—break all the unities of time and place, and carry you in imagination to the court of Menelaus and the far-famed Helena, (turn to the 4th book of the *Odyssæy*); you will find her employed in infusing a certain drug in wine she gives to her guests; the son of Nestor and the son of Ulysses. This pleasant beverage has been called in the Latin and in the English language *ne-penthé*; though Homer styles it *φαρμακον νηπενθες*,* the grief-assuaging medicine, using the word *νηπενθες* as an

* Derived from *εν*, signifying privation, and *πενθος*, grief.

adjective

adjective only. What this medicine might be, has puzzled the commentators. Read Homer's beautiful description of his powers, and consider its temporary effect, (for he confines its operation to the space of a day) and your penetration will suggest, that the medicine could be nothing but opium, or some infusion of the poppy; a plant, whose juice is even now imported from Turkey, and abounds in Egypt. In this passage, I catch Homer deriving his knowledge from that most antient people the Ægyptians. He tells us, that the beautiful Helena, while she was in Egypt with her husband, learned the use of this potion from Polydamna, the wife of Thón, an Egyptian king.

Now the fact is, Homer learned it himself from some of the Egyptian physicians. Herodotus says, that Egypt abounded with physicians of all sorts, and records a fact worthy of attention; that the same physicians then, did not, as they now do, attempt to cure all disorders indiscriminately; but that there was a particular physician for almost every disease; and that there were particular physicians or surgeons for the diseases of the ears, eyes, and teeth, (so that the tribe of our modern dentists has a very antient origin.

origin). It appears further, that opium was used in the days of Homer, (at least in the court of Sparta,) as it is now by the Turks, neither as a medicine nor as a poison, but as an article of luxury ; by means of its exhilarating quality.

Homer bestows the greatest encomiums in all parts of his works on poets and practitioners of the healing art—a collateral proof that he himself was both—read the following, and reverence yourself.

Ἴητρος δὲ ἕκαστος ἐπιστάμηνος περὶ πάντων

Ἀνθρώπων·—————

This question admits of a two-fold construction. Either—each intelligent physician is to be esteemed above all men,—or, each physician is skilful beyond all men ; adopt which sense you please.

LETTER VIII.
 REMARKS
 ON THE
 GREEK LANGUAGE.

SIR,

I AM by no means so good a judge of the Greek tongue as you suppose me to be : but the word “*μῦς*,” a muscle, is generally derived from the primitive noun “*μῦς*,” a mouse ; but I could almost wish to be authorized to derive it from the verb “*μύω*” to contract ; for though the first etymology expresses its form, the latter most happily expresses its action ; indeed, the language of Attica aptly expresses every idea of the human mind. The rays of genius seem to have shone on that happy spot, like the rays of the sun concentrated in the burning glass ; and her natives seem to have formed their language on the same principles of taste as they formed their statues : let us pursue the comparison a little.

The

The Pharnesian Hercules, for instance, expressed every possible perfection of strength and stability, without heaviness; and the Apollo Belvidere an equal degree of manly beauty, dignity, and elegance, without feebleness or effeminacy; and the Venus de Medicis all the female graces and beauty. Greece was proverbially famous for beautiful women; we have, however, no particulars delivered down to us of their stature; but, from an analogy with the size of modern beauties, one would at first be apt to imagine, that the Goddess of Beauty was sculptured rather too short of stature, for the perfection of the female figure.

The Grecians certainly had finer ears, and finer organs of speech, than other nations; for it is remarkable, that their language, amidst all its nervous vigour, had no harshness; and possessed at once the strength of the ancient Hebrew, with the softness and harmony of the modern Italian; and perhaps might likewise rival the boasted variety of the Arabic. Amidst a profusion of other excellencies, the Greek dual number constitutes a characteristic beauty; though, in my humble opinion, that boasted dual number would be still more complete, if the termination

nation of the nominative case was varied from that of the accusative, and the genitive from that of the dative. The Latin language wants this number entirely, and though well formed, in many respects, is comparatively barbarous. I very much wonder, therefore, how Virgil could work up such stubborn materials into so much harmony and elegance: for his *Georgics* throughout, and the 4th and 6th books of his *Æneid*, exhibit a finishing of stile, that perhaps never was equalled, and never will be exceeded. The Greek epic poet, however, had almost every advantage over the Latin. The Greek language, as improved in Homer's days, (for the poetic stile seems to have been previously established) possessed such a rich variety of dialects, and such an unbounded poetical licence, that I hold it to be absolutely impossible to compose bad-sounding Greek verses, however destitute of sense.

Let us examine any individual word in Greek, Latin, and English, each should be an echo to the sense; and to try the strength of this observation, let us fix upon the identical English noun-substantive "strength,"* in Greek *σθένος*, *κράτος*, *ἀλκή*, (for

E

the

The appropriated word for strength, in almost all modern language

the Greek is so far like the Arabic, that it has many different names to express one thing; all these three words, from the position of two consonants together, are strongly founding, but at the same time harmonious. The Latin noun "robur," from its beginning and ending with the rough letter "r," has a strong continued sound, but is not harmonious. The English monosyllable "strength," from having no less than six consonants to one vowel, and an aspirate at the end, is totally devoid of all harmony; but is exceedingly expressive of the idea annexed to it.

Ab uno—disce omnes.

P. S. Excuse this digression, and in my next I will pay all due respect to your Medical profession, and give you wounds or death, as usual.

guages, has a strong but harsh sound, viz. in the high German it is "starcko," in the Polish "metzna," in the Russian a similar word, but still rougher. Neither the French nor Italians have any strong word to express the idea; but the Hebrew noun (according to the English pronunciation) "geboorah," is so far like the Greek, that it is at once strong and harmonious.

LETTER

LETTER IX.
 THE DEATH
 OF
 ULYSSES' DOG.

SIR,

THERE is a peculiar fidelity and attachment to their masters, that distinguishes the whole canine species, and has ever rendered them to me favourite animals. They are not so with you. But, however, you need be under no apprehension from the dog that I mean to introduce to you, (though a tremendous one,) for he has been dead more than two thousand years. Peruse the 17th book of the *Odyssey*, and you will most likely be pleased with natural history, no less than poetry. When Ulysses, accompanied by Eumæus, entered his palace-yard, the first living creature that noticed him, was his old dog Argus, the faithful guardian of the gate. And I am sorry to add, that he was lying on a dunghill: and what has given great offence to some fastidious

critics, ἐνὶ πλεῖστον κυνοφαΐσεων, full of vermin. But (as his faculties most probably were somewhat decayed by age) on the first approach of his master he did not appear to know him; for he raised his head and erected his ears, partly from anger and partly from surprize; yet when his Lord approached near, ἐγγύς ὄντα, he, by scent, then knew him under all disguise, dropped his ears, and gently moved his tail, in token of gratulation. In this situation, (for it seems the poor aged animal was too weak to make further advances towards his King) according to the strong phrase of Homeric poetry, "the fate of black death seized him,"

Then—

Soft pity touch'd the mighty master's soul,
And down his cheek a tear unbidden stole.

POPE.

The hardened veteran hero, who had seen all the horrors of war and desolation, unmoved, was instantly affected by this instance of canine fidelity.

When we consider the greatest poet the world has ever produced, in his mendicant character, and consider at the same time that almost all the houses of the Grecian nobility were, more or less, guarded
by

by large and fierce dogs. If we may compare great things with small, we may assign Homer's knowledge of the canine disposition, to the same principle with that of our noted mendicant, the late Bampfylde Moore Carew, who was said to understand dogs better than any man in England.

Argus is described as of very large size, but whether he was a true buck-hound or a greyhound, or what, is not clear. I should rather suppose the latter, from his name, which signifies "swift."* Critics object to the advanced age of this animal, for he was at that time at least twenty years old. Aristotle, the great naturalist and universal philosopher, who lived in Greece, must be the best judge in this matter; and if I remember rightly from quotations and extracts, (for I never pretend to have read Aristotle's works at large) he favours Homer's idea of canine longevity. The critics next are puzzled to find out the cause of the sudden death of Argus; some say he died for joy. The poet had a better reason for dispatching him so suddenly; for had the dog lived, he would have followed, and thereby betrayed the old king under the appearance of a beggar.

* Vide Clarke's Homer.

I cannot

I cannot help exclaiming—Argus ! happy dog ! for thou art the only one whose death is recorded in the same pages with the most renowned heroes of antiquity.

P. S. In answer to your last letter, I now inform you, that the juice of the poppy, (in Arabic, affion,) first obtained the name of opium from Galen; who formed the word from “*ὀπῶς*,” juice, as if he meant to stile it *the juice*, by way of eminence; in the same manner as modern physicians call Peruvian bark, *the bark*, from its superior virtue to any other.

You say you cannot comprehend why the Greek word “*φῆν*,” in the singular number, should signify “mind,” and “*φῆνες*,” in the plural, should signify “præcordia,” I can only account for it this way, that many of the ancient philosophers thought, (a little absurdly) that the heart, and parts adjacent, were the seat of the soul. I fancy this was in some measure the doctrine of the wise men of Egypt; the Hebrews were evidently a colony from thence; and there are some expressions in the Hebrew language that confirm this idea. The Greeks certainly derived most of their knowledge from Egypt; and it is very unfortunate, that almost all Egyptian records are lost.

Galen

Galen and Pliny, however, inform us, that the science of anatomy was studied in Egypt at a very early period ; and that it was patronized by some of her most antient monarchs.* The fact is highly probable in itself, for bodies could not be embalmed without being first opened.

Homer, in his travels through Egypt, certainly gathered the first rudiments of his chirurgical, medical, and anatomical knowledge ; and of which he made a most judicious use, in his Iliad and Odyssæy.

* Eusebius, (on the credit of Manetho, an Egyptian,) relates that Athotis, a King of Egypt, wrote some treatises on anatomy at an incredibly early period, viz. within a few ages after the creation of the world, and the formation of man.



S I R,

I N answer to your last letter, I have perused, though in a cursory manner, Lucretius's Philosophical Poem "*De Rerum Natura*," but had never seen that Book when I gave you my remarks on the Pestilence in the Grecian Camp, as described by Homer.

Lucretius is a singular kind of a poet, little known and little read at public grammar schools;* he was a teacher of what Horace calls "*Insanientis Sapientiae*—foolish wisdom, or insane philosophy," since he followed the Epicurean system implicitly: he was, I think, a cotemporary with that ornament of Roman literature, Marcus Tullius Cicero, who is said to have corrected his verses. This circumstance is not very probable; for the Roman orator, though almost

* Lucretius has of late been much studied at both Universities.

an universal genius, was but an indifferent poet; besides, in his treatise on "the Nature of the Gods," he displayed his usual eloquence against the pernicious doctrines of the philosopher of Gargettum *

Cornelius Nepos ranks Lucretius among the most elegant poets: Ovid affected to admire him very much; and Virgil is reported to have studied him greatly, and doubtless meant to exhibit him, or rather Epicurus himself, under the name of Silenus, in his 6th Pastoral Eclogue——

*Namque canebat, uti magnum per inane coacta
Semina, terrarumque, animæque, marisque fuissent,
Et liquidi simul ignis :——*

He sung the secret seeds of Nature's frame;
How seas, and earth, and air, and active flame,
Fell thro' the mighty Void; and in the fall
Were blindly gather'd in this goodly Ball.

DRYDEN.

But the judicious Virgil, in his 6th Æneid, hath availed himself of the nobler and sublimer philosophies of Pythagoras and Plato.

So much for the history of the Bard,—his descrip-

* Epicurus was born at Gargettum, about 350 years before the Christian æra; when Philip (the father of Alexander) was King of Macedon.

tion of the Pestilence * at Athens, which concludes his poem, is perhaps the best part of it. But read him attentively, and you will clearly perceive, that it was by no means the true Plague, such as generally prevails at Constantinople, Smyrna, Grand Cairo, &c. but, by his description, in my humble opinion, it appears to be more like the modern † ulcerous fore-throat, attended with a malignant, indeed a most malignant fever. He prefaces his description by remarking, that the inhabitants of different climates are constitutionally liable to different diseases; and that travellers, by going into strange countries, contract new disorders from the different

* The Pestilence which happened at Athens in the beginning of the summer of the 3d year of the 87th Olympiad, (or the 2d year of the Peloponnesian war) is differently related by different authors, though all agree in its virulency and fatality. The cause of it hath been by some attributed to the ambition of the Athenian General Pericles; for, if he did not cause it, he at least contributed to its continuance and increase, by confining so many troops within the limits of the city at a warm season of the year, with little or no provisions to support them; Famine and Pestilence being ever inseparable companions; for, which-ever of the two precedes, the other is almost sure to follow.

† *Sudabant etiam fauces intrinsecus atro
Sanguine, et ulceribus vocis via septo coibat.*

LUGER.

Can any words in any language describe a malignant ulcerous fore-throat more characteristically.

happens

states of the atmosphere.* He says the same thing happens, when by a long continuance of the wind blowing in the same tract, or, (as we should now say) from the same point of the compass, the air of one region is blown in upon another; and tells us, that the Athenian malady was occasioned by the unwholesome air that was blown into Attica from the hot sands of Egypt. However, be that as it may—according to Lucretius's account, (for at present I refer to no other) it certainly was not the true Plague—he specifies ulcers in the throat—no symptom; and he mentions nothing of swelling in the glands of the throat and groin, which are characteristic symptoms. Besides, according to him, the disease generally terminated in eight days, whereas the genuine and true Plague seldom extends its paroxysms beyond the space of four days; yet, if the poet be not hyperbolically poetical, the disease was the most malignant that ever invaded the human race. He says the heat was like the sacred fire † by

* It is rather remarkable, that Lucretius mentions the air of our British island; and by contrasting it with the air on the banks of the Nile in Egypt, we may draw a tacit conclusion, that he thought our air at least comparatively wholesome.

† Virgil in his beautiful description of the pestilence among cattle in his 3d Georgic, calls the fever that attended it, "facer ignis."

which

which I suppose he means, what we now call St. Anthony's fire; but, does not the poetical philosopher contradict himself a little? For such extreme malignancy (if not otherwise removed) must destroy the constitution in a very few days. And in confirmation of this opinion, you will recollect, that those, who have the most violent seizures of the Plague, die almost suddenly; and the livid spots, (tokens as they are called) and other marks of mortification, take place almost immediately. Among other unhappy consequences, we are informed (a fact which all Historians confirm) that those few who recovered, frequently lost both their memory and intellect; a pretty clear proof that the nerves, or rather their origin, had suffered an irreparable injury from the action of the pestilential virus.

Thucydides the historian, who himself was afflicted with the disorder, is a singular and happy instance to the contrary; as we perceive by every page of his history, which was composed after his recovery. It does not appear what remedies were used; though, from the subsequent practice of Hippocrates and other physicians, it is highly probable that the Athenian practitioners of medicine made

use of vegetable acids, from a two-fold reason: with an intent both to quench thirst and to prevent putrefaction; but, we are told in general terms, that those medicines that relieved one patient increased the complaint in another. Some, to allay their thirst, and to cool the burning heat, leaped into wells of water and into rivers, and so experienced the effects of the cold bath, to no salutary purpose.

Considering yourself as a gentleman of the faculty, I cannot refrain from adding, (as I have not the original poem by me) in the words of the only translation extant.

“ Physicians came and saw, *and shook their head.*”

So,

Take learned Leach,
The words of Creech,
And shake not your head at

Your devoted, &c. &c.

LETTER XI.

—*Modo—Thebis, modo ponit Athenis.*

HOR.

SIR,

IF Poets claim the privilege of conveying their readers where and whence they please, I must beg the same indulgence; and having carried you safe through the Plague at Athens; I beg leave now to bring you back again to the 4th Book of the Iliad, and to recall your attention to the first wound there recorded. Pope has anticipated almost every thing which I could suggest, upon the various circumstances that preceded it; to him therefore you are referred. It is not always that his comments are just, and here they are beautiful; but, respecting the peculiarities of the wound itself, he adopts his usual silence, and makes a common blunder in translating.

From your knowledge of the Grecian antiquities, you cannot but feel the propriety of the passage of the arrow (from the bow of Pandarus) through the
different

different parts and joints of the armour of Menelaus; why it should fix in the thigh, and why it should have so far spent its force, as to wound only the skin (and superficial muscles) for though Homer specifies only "*χεῖρα, cutem,*" more must be implied than is expressed; for had the skin of the hero been as thick as that of an elephant or rhinoceros, and as tough as that of a crocodile, the arrow must have penetrated some of the muscles, or some small vein at least; from the following description; read and admire—

————— Μιάνδιν αἵματι μηροῖ
Εὐφύτας, κνήμαί, τε ἠδὲ σφυρὰ κάλ' ὑπώνευθε..

And accept the following attempt towards a verbal translation:—

—— then were distain'd with blood his thighs
Well-form'd, his legs, and ancles fair beneath.

Adown his snowy thigh distill'd the streaming flood.

Says POPE.

Bravo, Mr. Pope! the blood does indeed trickle through the length of an Alexandrine line; but all the painting of the original is not preserved. Read further, and you will find that Machaon, the army-surgeon was sent for (or in the medical phrase) called

in; but previously to his arrival, Menelaus himself had perceived “ ὄγκους ἔκτος ἰόντας,” the barbs of the arrow projecting outside, and consequently that they had not penetrated; and he encouraged his afflicted brother Agamemnon from this lucky circumstance. I am not quite clear that I exactly understand the affair of extracting the arrow. No learned commentator ever throws any light on these matters—advert to the original next:—Machaon, on his arrival, immediately extracted the arrow, (mark the expression, “ ἐκ ζωνῆς,” out of the belt; and while that was extracting, “ πάλιν ἄγει ὀξείας ὄγκους,” which Clarke translates, “ *retro * curvati sunt acuti hami.*” When a translator has given a Latin word for each Greek word, he thinks he has done his duty; and leaves the reader to guess the meaning: Is it meant, that the barbs were only curved backwards, or that they were actually broken? Do you inform me if you can. The surgeon however removed the belt, tunic, &c. and then came to the naked wound; when, according to the simplicity and unimproved state of antient surgery, he sucked the wound, and applied lenient medicines, which Chiron, in his friendship, had given

* More properly *retro ducti*.

to Æsculapius the father of Machaon. What this Chironian nostrum was, the poet has not told us. Has he herein concealed his knowledge or his ignorance? In my humble opinion, this said wound of Menelaus is one of those, that in a good constitution must have soon healed of its own accord, from the mere efforts of Nature to relieve herself.

P. S. All the intricacy in understanding this wound is easily removed, by recollecting that the difficulty of extracting the arrow arose from the resistance of the belt, through which the barbs of the arrow had passed, but never entered deep in the thigh; and in the belt it was that these barbs were incurvated, &c, which was the reason why the judicious surgeon removed the tunic, and other integuments, to come at the wound: it appears likewise, that the wound must have been very high up in the thigh, from all circumstances.

I cannot quit this subject, without observing a very glaring instance of duplicity in Minerva, and such as ill became the Goddess of Wisdom, or the daughter of Jove; for she first advised Pandarus to break the truce by shooting an arrow at Menelaus; and afterwards, by her celestial power, directed the well-

aimed arrow in such a manner as it might not wound any vital part. What shall we say to this, or how is this conduct to be vindicated? Was it, that Minerva, considered in her military capacity as the Goddess of Arms, thought herself authorized, at any rate, to break the truce, and to renew the war, in which she delighted, and over which she officially presided.

LETTER XII.

COMPARISON

OF

HOMER AND VIRGIL.

SIR,

YOU ask my opinion respecting the Anatomical and Medical Knowledge of Virgil. I mean very soon to give you my free sentiments on that subject. For, in order to illustrate the matter of my last letter, I intend in my next, or in some future letter, to consider Æneas' second wound in his thigh (for you will remember that he is rather supernaturally

pernaturally cured of one already in the Iliad) as recorded by Virgil in his 12th book; but I must beg leave to be indulged in a few previous remarks on the comparative excellencies of the two best epic poems in the world.—Virgil has, properly speaking, comprised both the subjects of the Iliad and Odyssey in his Æneid: and though his six last books are manifestly inferior to the Iliad, his six first, or at least two of them, (viz. the 4th and 6th Æneid) are apparently superior to the Odyssey; Virgil having, with great judgment, omitted some of the long stories, incredible facts, and other little absurdities that mark the old age of Homer. He seems in his Odyssey to be, what he has described his own old Nestor in the Iliad, “narrative with age,” and sometimes forgetting himself a little. What think you of Ulysses saving his life in the den of the giant Polyphemus, by the subterfuge of a very indifferent pun? Would such low wit be borne in any modern heroic poem? Again, Ulysses in the Iliad is drawn as a vigilant warrior; in the Odyssey, he is often a *sleeping hero*, and at those times, of all others, in which it behoves him to be awake; in his voyage he falls asleep, and his companions let the wind out
of

of their bags. But of all seasons, we should suppose the long absent hero would have his attention most kept up on the near prospect of his native country; whereas, on the contrary, Ulysses, after a short and very prosperous voyage from the Island of Phæacia, without any previous fatigue, or any other apparent cause, is landed on the rough shore of Ithaca, (like a more modern knight in an enchanted castle) together with all his treasures, in a most profound sleep. Pray does not Homer himself nod a little? There are spots on the sun, and they are rendered the more visible by the surrounding splendors. The same may be said of the poem in question.

The most striking difference between the Greek and Latin epic poem is, that the former is by much the more dramatic; the characters are the most discriminated, and the deaths and wounds the most deverified. This circumstance is rather singular, when we take into consideration the great improvements made in the science of Anatomy and Surgery, from Homer's time to Virgil's. The former appears to have best understood the human frame, and the latter to have confined his knowledge to the natural history and diseases of animals: which, next to agriculture,

culture, seems to have been his forte: and this knowledge is most beautifully displayed in almost every page of the Georgics: perhaps the most finished and correct poem that the world has ever produced. But the practice of medicine, even in Virgil's days, was confined to herbs and simples.

Scire potestates herbarum, ——

To know the power of herbs ——

Was all that the medical art could then boast of.—
Antonius Musa had indeed introduced the use of the cold bath medicinally; but the poet, to discriminate the age he lived in, from that of which he wrote, by

—— — *Natos ad flumina primum*

Deferimus, sævæque gelu duramus et undis.

Strong from the cradle of a sturdy brood,
We bear our new-born infants to the flood.—DRYDEN.

only means that the antient natives of Latium, (like the modern Russians) hardened the bodies of their infants, by bathing them in the cold streams, amidst ice and snow, without any medicinal intention.

According

According to the best accounts, Virgil's knowledge of those useful animals, dogs and horses, first introduced him to the notice of his munificent patron Augustus.

An unexpected circumstance obliges me to break off abruptly.

Yours, &c. &c.

N. B. The reason of Virgil's adopting the Epicurean system in his 6th Eclogue, was because that pastoral was dedicated to Varus, who was a great favourer of the Epicurean doctrine.



LETTER

LETTER XIII.

THE POETRY

OF

LUCRETIIUS.

*Carmina sublimis tunc sunt peritura Lucreti,
Exitio terras cum dabit una dies.* OVID.

SIR,

YOUR professional engagements may perhaps be the best excuse for the shortness and infrequency of your letters; in answer to your last, before I can give you any satisfaction, I must digress a little from my subject. You ask me why I call Virgil's *Æneid* the second best poem (you doubtless mean epic poem, for such was my expression) in any language.—You flatter me highly on the light that you say I have thrown on that dark subject, the Plague (as it has been commonly called) at Athens. You say that the malignant ulcerous fore-throat (though you had never previously marked the circumstance)

cumstance) was most certainly a leading symptom, if not the malady itself, as described by Lucretius; who, by the bye, did little more than versify the account given by Thucydides. You seem, tacitly at least, to upbraid me for under-rating or passing over in silence, the excellent poetry of Lucretius:—to be candid with you; I confess myself prejudiced in disfavour of the Poet, out of indignation and contempt of his philosophical principles, which I think are impiously absurd; and that he has transplanted many a rank weed from the garden of Epicurus.

I have, in this remote part of the kingdom, with great difficulty at last procured an edition of Lucretius; on perusing him, I observe, that where the subject will admit, he is generally poetical; though his versification is sometimes inelegant, harsh, and unharmonious; and his thoughts, from the nature of the subject, sometimes prosaic; but this very circumstance gives him a certain kind of variety. I will do him all poetical justice, as far as my abilities extend. Peruse his exordium, which is beautiful beyond description. The author, as a professed philosopher of pleasure, opens his poem with beautiful propriety, by an address to Venus the Queen of Love,

which

which he considers as a kind of plastic power which pervades the universe. The phrase of "*Æneadum genetrix*" anticipates, in some measure, the noble design of Virgil, in deriving the Roman race from *Æneas*, the son of *Venus* by *Anchises*.—Read the following lines, and admit my flying translation.

*Te, Dea, te fugiunt venti, te nubila cæli,
Adventumque tuum: tibi suaves dædala tellus
Submittit flores; tibi rident æquora ponti,
Placatumque nitet diffuso lumine cælum.*

The winds at thy approach, fair Goddess! fly,
Nor intervening clouds obscure the sky;
To thee wide earth expands her incense sweet,
And lays her choicest flowers at thy feet;
For thee old Ocean smiles in transport bright,
And heaven around shines with diffused light.

I am not fond of Latin quotations, but indulge me with the following, and excuse another flying version,—speaking of "the Grecian man," meaning, by way of eminence, *Epicurus*—

—*Vivida vis animi pervicit, et extra
Præcessit longè flammantia mœnia Mundi,
Atque omne immensum peragravit mente animoque.*

Of Græcia's sage the daring vivid mind
 To Nature's limits scorn'd to be confine'd ;
 He pass'd the flaming bounds of time and place,
 And, in idea, reach'd the mighty void of space.

The sublimity of the original merits the comment of a Longinus; and, if I mistake not, your admired Milton has imitated those very verses in one of the sublimest passages of his *Paradise Lost*.—Read a little further, and admire with me the description of Iphigenia's being sacrificed at Aulis, under the ridiculously-barbarous pretence (so justly condemned by the poet) of obtaining a fair wind for the Grecian fleet to Troy, Euripides has composed a tragedy upon this very subject; but, much as I admire him, I doubt whether all he says in his extended Drama exceeds this short description—the philosophical poet does more than describe, he actually paints: we see the lovely Iphigenia standing before the altar of Diana,—her head adorned with the devoted garland—advert to the original.

— *Mæstum ante aras adflare parentem;
 Et hunc propter ferrum celare ministros.*

We behold here the parent, the disconsolate Agamemnon, standing before the altar and the ministering priests (those sacred butchers!) artfully concealing the fatal knife, or dagger, from the dreaded eyes of the father; the citizens weeping around; and the ill-fated victim, with her maiden eyes modestly fixed on the ground.—The poet describes her in the bloom of youth, and fitter to be devoted at the pleasing shrine of Hymen.—Time will not allow me a full discussion—but I refer you to the description of the winds,

— *Venti vis verberat incita Pontum.*

But above all to that universally admired passage

Avia Pieridum, &c. &c.

wherein he declares his love of the Muses, in language little, if any thing inferior to Virgil, on the same occasion. And his concluding line

Museo contingens cuncta lepore.

though a little boastful, is happily expressive, of his endeavour at least, to polish his versification.

Yours, &c.

P. S. On re-perusing the original description, I find that a particular dejection of spirits preceded, or was at least a leading symptom of the malignant fever in Athens; as I believe it is now pretty universally allowed to be of all malignant diseases, without exception. A clear proof that the pestilential infection affects the nerves, and nervous fluid, (if any such there be) as soon or sooner than it acts on the blood, whose texture perhaps it dissolves by slow degrees. And the action of the Peruvian bark (the only known specific in these diseases) so friendly to the nerves, is a further proof.—To a physician how shall I sufficiently express my admiration of the virtues of this noble medicine? What does it, or rather what does it not do? It is, perhaps, (as far as any medicine can be) a cordial for the maladies of mind and body. It lessens diseased irritability, and at the same time restores lost sensibility to the enfeebled nerves; and in a dissolved state of the blood, it stops the further progress of putrefaction by its specific quality. I say specific, because other astringents and bitters have not the same power; the *Cortex Peruviana* is certainly the most valuable commodity that ever was imported from the new discovered world of America;

in

in my humble opinion, more valuable than all the gold of Mexico and Peru · and if the idea be not too enthusiastic; it seems to be the rind of a tree; not unlike the tree of life in the garden of Paradise, and had its efficacy been discovered in the days of Hippocrates, he would thereby have rendered man all but immortal.

LETTER XIV.

BEAUTIES OF MILTON.

Milton's strong pinion now not Heaven can bound,
 Now, serpent-like, in prose he creeps the ground;
 In quibble Angel, with Arch-angel join,
 And God the Father turns a School-Divine.

POPE.

SIR,

OUR admired Pope (however deficient in the higher flights of the imagination) is remarkable for condensing more good sense in fewer words than any poet, ancient or modern: and he has anticipated concisely

concisely all that I could say at large, in further answer to your letter, wherein you think I degrade Milton's *Paradise Lost*, by giving preference to the *Iliad* and *Æneid*. I think many parts of Milton, particularly of the first, second, and sixth Book, superior to any thing in Homer: and think some other passages replete with prosaic sentiment, flat thought, jingle of words, forced antithesis, false wit, pun, quibble, &c. to be as much below Homer, Virgil, or any other epic poet whatever, in any age, whose works are come down to our hands.

The beauties of *Paradise Lost* have been so ably and amply delineated by the elegant pen of Addison, that little or nothing can be added,—I wish, therefore barely to recall your recollection to the situation of the fallen angels chained on the burning lake—their nine days' astonishment after their fall—the superior stature of their chief “so proudly eminent,” the *fierté* of his aspiring ambition—when he declares

“to reign is worth ambition, tho' in Hell;

“Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven.”

Milton often brings objects both to the ear and eyes—hark!—when Saturn called on his associates—

“He

“ He call’d so loud, that all the hollow deep
 “ Of Hell resounded.”

And a little further on,

“ his universal host upsent
 “ A shout, that tore hell’s concave; and beyond
 “ Frighted the reign of chaos and old night.”

Mark

“ Azazel ——— cherub tall,
 “ Who forthwith from the glittering staff unfurl’d
 “ Th’ Imperial ensign : which, full high advanc’d,
 “ Shone like a meteor, streaming to the wind,
 “ With gems and golden lustre rich emblaz’d,
 “ Seraphic arms and trophies ;”

See! when

“ out flew
 “ Millions of flaming swords, drawn from the thighs
 “ Of mighty Cherubim : the sudden blaze
 “ Far round illumin’d hell.”

Behold the sudden and wonderful erection of the

“ Pandæmonium, the high capital
 “ Of Satan and his peers,”
 which “ rose like an
 “ Exhalation,” and in which (tho’ the inferior
 “ Spirits

“ Spirits . . . “ to smallest forms
 “ Reduc’d their shapes immense.”)—
 There was yet left room “ within”
 That “ in their own dimensions, like themselves
 “ The great seraphic lords and cherubim”
 Might fit at large.

Mark likewise,

how “ shone,
 “ Above them all th’ Arch-angel ; but his face
 “ Deep scars of thunder had entrench’d.”

These sublime images close the first Book.

I feel inclined to go on ; but I find myself checked in the career, when I consider that that British Longinus, Addison, has been so very diffuse and copious in his remarks on the beauties of Milton, that it is hardly possible to say any thing new ; though it were an easy, were it not at the same time an invidious, task, to discover numberless glaring faults, “ thick as autumnal leaves,” which Addisonian candour has passed over in silence : but of this more hereafter.

I shall therefore at present only beg to recall your attention to the debates of the fallen Angels in the house of Pandæmonium, in the second Book ; and particularly

particularly to the daring voyage of Satan through the regions of chaos. I do not know that any one has hitherto made the same observation; but from my recent perusal of Lucretius, it appears pretty evident, that Milton had his philosophical principles in idea—let the poet speak for himself.

“ For hot, cold, moist and dry, four champions fierce
 “ Strive here for mastery, and to battle bring
 “ Their embryon Atoms.”

And again, when Satan meets “ a vast vacuity.” Do you not immediately think on the *Vacuum* or *Inanè* of Lucretius?

And lastly, the remarkable phrase of “ CHANCE governs all,” is evidently derived from the same fountain; though the well-judging Milton has with great address confined the Epicurean absurdities to the chimerical realms of chaos; which the Roman Epicurean bard has blindly introduced into the system of the existing universe.—For other striking passages of the *Paradise Lost*, turn to the beginning of the third Book,

“ Hail, holy light, offspring of heaven first-born!”

And to Satan’s speech to the sun in the 4th Book:

“ O thou,

“ O thou, that with surpassing glory crown’d,
 “ Look’st from thy sole dominion, like the God
 “ Of this new world, &c. &c.

And lastly, continue your attention on to the sixth Book, and tell me if any bold images in Homer’s Battle of the Gods equal in any degree the fight of the Angels, and the triumphant superiority of the Messiah; when he

“ In the chariot of paternal Deity—
 “ Under whose burning wheels
 “ The stedfast Empyrean shook throughout,
 “ All but the throne itself of God,”
 And “ in cœlestial panoply all arm’d,
 And “ at whose right hand Victory
 “ Sat Eagle-wing’d,” when he, “ in his right hand
 “ Grasping ten thousand thunders,—
 “ O’er shields, and helms and helmed heads he rode
 “ Of mighty seraphim prostrate ;—
 “ Yet half his strength he put not forth, but check’d
 “ His thunder in mid volley.”

I know no poet, ancient or modern, from whom these great ideas can be borrowed; but in many other circumstances of the angelic conflict, I think Milton takes a few ideas from Hesiod. I freely
 confess

confess likewise with the great Dryden, that till I came to the sixth Book, I was a little inclined to believe that the Devil was Milton's hero, In the conclusion of this letter, I mean to pay all due attention to your profession, and will treat you with an Angelic, or perhaps, more properly speaking, a Diabolic wound.

“ the sword

“ Of Michael from the armory of God
 “ Was given him temper'd so, that neither keen
 “ Nor solid might resist that edge : it met
 “ The sword of Satan, with steep force to smite
 “ Descending ; and in half cut sheer ; nor staid,
 “ But with swift wheel reverse, deep entering shar'd
 “ All his right side : then Satan first knew pain,
 “ And writh'd him to and fro' convolv'd ; so fore
 “ The griding sword with discontinuous wound
 “ Pass'd thro' him ; but th' ethereal substance clos'd,
 “ Not long divisible, ; and from the gash
 “ A stream of nectarous humour issuing flow'd,
 “ Sanguine (such as cœlestial Spirits may bleed).”

This seems a proper wound for one angel to inflict, and another to sustain. Some part of these lines are imitated from Homer ; but there is no Machaon required

required for the cure of this wound; since happily spiritual wounds (if I may be allowed such an expression) heal spontaneously. This is an idea different from Homer's notion; for the wounds of his Mars and Venus, as I have observed, could not be healed without the divine assistance or surgery of Pæan.

Attend likewise to a Miltonic death-wound: and this is also remarkable for being the first death on record; when Cain murdered Abel

“ — he —

“ Smote him into the midriff with a stone,

“ And beat out life; he fell; and deadly pale

“ Groan'd out his soul, and gushing blood effus'd.”

This last line is Virgil all over: “*Vitaque cum gemitu,*” and again “*tenuemque—sanguine vitam.*” We have very little room given for judging the anatomical knowledge of Milton: but I think this wound is very little defensible, as we are told that the stone smote into the diaphragm; though we are not told in what part, or in what direction. But it might probably enough wound the aorta, or possibly the vena cava; and so cause the effusion of blood described.

I have not yet done with you in your anatomical capacity;

capacity; but I mean next to introduce you into a kind of Miltonic hospital—look and see

“ — - immediately a place

- “ Before his eyes appear'd, sad, noisome, dark,
- “ A lazar-house it seem'd; wherein were laid
- “ Numbers of all diseas'd: all maladies
- “ Of ghastly spasm, or racking tortures, qualms
- “ Of heart sick agony, all fev'rous kinds,
- “ Convulsions, epilepsies, fierce catarrhs,
- “ Intestine stone and ulcer, cholic pangs,
- “ Dæmoniac presy, moaping melancholy,
- “ And moon-struck madness; pining atrophy,
- “ Marasmus, and wide-wasting pestilence;
- “ Dropsies, and asthmas, and joint-racking rheums.”

Here is a tremendous enumeration of maladies for your medical consideration! The author seems to enumerate diseases with a scientific propriety; though I do not clearly comprehend what idea he meant to convey by the epithet “fierce,”* as applied to catarrhs. Is not this more poetical than medical? I have heard of a physician who dared to pronounce the above catalogue imperfect, because there was no mention of the gout; but I rather think there is great judgment in the omission: for, in my opinion the

H

Athritis

* Fierce, from the Latin word “acris”, may possibly mean “sharp or corroding,”

Athritis was no ante-diluvian complaint. It certainly originated from luxury: since no savage, in a state of nature, (let the climate be hot or cold) ever feels its effects—what think you?

Yours, &c.

LETTER XV.

FAULTS OF MILTON.

SIR,

MILTON's Ostentation of Learning has been justly censured; for Poets are generally supposed to write from inspiration. And when they occasionally treat of arts and sciences, their knowledge should ever be expressed in poetical, and not in technical language, which is more or less prosaic: whereas the depths of philosophy should of all things be enlightened with the charms of poetry.

Many of the abstruse terms of art in the Paradise Lost are not very intelligible; but, I think in some places, the ideas are unscientific. I mean to give you

two

two instances, that I have never seen remarked by any one:—In the third Book, Satan is described as passing “among innumerable stars” that seem’d “other worlds;” a clear proof that the author possessed a just notion of the plurality of worlds, and of the extended system of the universe: but read a little further, and you will perceive, that speaking of the sun’s “magnetic beams,” he says; that it “gently warms the UNIVERSE;” whereas, in strict astronomical propriety, he could only mean that the solar beam warms those planets, that revolve round him; and which, together with the sun, compose the solar system. Again, in the 4th Book, describing the celerity of Uriel “gliding on the sun-beams,” he says,

“ — swift as a falling star * ,

“ In autumn thwarts the sky” —

Is not this idea again a little unphilosophical! Does he not compare Uriel’s motion to a motion that never occurs? Milton certainly, as an eminent astronomer, could not be at a loss to learn, that stars neither shoot nor fall.—But what would a modern

* Milton has this same comparison in his first Book, when speaking of Lucifer, it is said, he

“ Dropt from the zenith like a falling star,”

critic say to the following, in an heroic poem?

“ *To know, to know no more.*”

And of

“ *Planets planet-struck.*”

But above all

“ *Deſtruction with deſtruction to deſtroy.*”

These few instances have escaped the penetration of Addison, who has most delightfully displayed the shining parts of Miltonian poetry; but I think Pope is a better and keener judge of the glaring faults; and he has, after his usual manner, expressed more meaning in three lines, than some critics would do in thirty pages; and it is under the sanction of so great a man, that I dare proceed. From him I have taken my text; to which let me advert—

“ *And God the Father turns a School-Divine.*”

Read some of the speeches attributed to him, and you may perhaps think with me, that as Milton was a great logician, and famous disputant; he had perhaps some celebrated professor or moderator of the Divinity-schools in his eye, when he composed these logical, but unpoetical speeches. I do not dislike altogether puns in their proper places; but I think they

they are every way beneath the dignity of the heroic muse

Milton spent part of his life under the dull reign of bigot James, when quibbles were in high fashion: when the Monarch quibbled from the throne, the Prelate punned from the pulpit, and the Lawyer at the bar. That our inimitable Shakespear should be infected with this vice, in some of the most pathetic parts of his Drama, is not very wonderful; since he conversed very little with the antient classics. But this circumstance is the more extraordinary, in our English Homer, (if I may so call him) because he formed his taste upon the model of the Iliad, Æneid, and other epic poems. The Greek epic poet never punned but once in all his poems; and the chafter Roman never.

Milton (in his day, perhaps, mindful of the recent occurrence of the fifth of November) has with some little propriety made the Devil the inventor of gunpowder; and perhaps he intended to attribute the invention of puns likewise to a diabolical origin. For after the Satanic hosts had, by a kind of gunpowder plot, in some measure overthrown the Arch-angels,

by their heavy cannon shot; they afterwards peppered them with a volley of light-armed puns like small shot. Respecting their nature, since they were practised by *Devils*, I can only add, they are so very characteristic, they are *Devilish bad ones*.—Longinus somewhere advises, that a critic should comment upon a poet, in language like his own. The application is obvious, and I screen myself from your resentment by a precedent from such respectable authority.

P. S. Milton's fame does not entirely depend upon the *Paradise Lost*, His *Sampson Agonistes*, (a tragedy composed after the manner of the Grecian dramatists, accompanied with chorus, &c. &c. would not have disgraced the Athenian stage; his *Mask of Comus* likewise is exquisitely beautiful. Respecting his *Paradise Regain'd*, more hereafter; but without noticing his other poetical productions, he had the singular merit of being one of the best prose writers of his age.

LETTER

LETTER XVI.

REMARKS

ON

PARADISE REGAIN'D.

SIR,

YOUR correspondence is so far like the proceedings of the High Court of Chancery, that it consists chiefly of interrogatories. In answer to your last quere, I do not think quite so contemptibly of Milton's* Paradise Regain'd as you are pleas'd to conceive. This is a great falling off indeed! The mighty genius of Milton, like the strength of his

* The subject of this little heroic poem (which is so far perfect, at least according to Aristotle's rules, that it has a beginning, a middle, and an end.) is the temptation of Christ in the wilderness. The space of time in which the action is included is very short indeed; the whole time that Christ remained in the wilderness, according to the scriptural account, is forty days: and the temptation began nearly at the end of these days. The scene is chiefly in the desert, though occasionally it changes to the top of an exceeding high mountain, and to the pinnacle or battlement of the temple in Jerusalem.

“Herculian

"Herculean Sampson," though lost in the general, breaks out again at intervals. The first part of the poem is rather prosaic, and in some parts consists chiefly of scriptural narration: and it is here that his poetry suffers most from his divinity.

Modo ponit Athenis, would be no bad motto for my desultory epistles—apropos of Athens!—It is your and my favourite spot of the whole globe. Read how the poet describes its situation, edifices, and other distinguishing circumstances.

" ——— Behold

"Where on th' Ægean shore a city stands,
 "Built nobly, pure the air, and light the soil,
 Athens, the eye of Greece, mother of arts
 And eloquence; native to famous wits
 Or hospitable, in her sweet recess
 City or suburbs, studious walks and shades."

You, I know, are much enamoured of the poetical philosophy of Plato—take the poet's own words—

"See the olive grove of Academe,
 "Plato's retirement; where the attic bird
 "Trills her thick-warbled notes the summer long."

Aristotle

Aristotle is another of your old favourites;

——Mark——“ there Ilissus rolls

“ His whisp’ring stream; within the walls then view

“ The schools of antient sages: HIS, who bred

“ Great Alexander to subdue the world.”

And remark likewise the poet’s gratitude to his great master; when, after the mention of

“ ——Æolian charms, and Dorian lyric odes,”

he specifies

“ HIS, who gave them breath, but higher sung,

“ Blind Melesigenes thence Homer call’d,

“ Whose poem Phœbus challeng’d for his own.”

Milton appears to have been well acquainted with Æschylus, the father of the Greek tragedy, as well as with Sophocles and Euripides, the successive improvers. But when you consider the dignity and sublimity of the two first, and the elegant sententious brevity of the latter; we may, I think, conclude that Æschylus and Sophocles were meant by some, and Euripides* by the other parts, of the following lines. Read and determine,

* Milton, in his Treatise (Tractate he calls it) on Education, mentions only Sophocles and Euripides, as the Authors of “Attic tragedies of stateliest and most regal argument;” though it is a little singular, that among the Latin classics, he recommends the perusal of Lucretius.

“ Thence

" Thence what the lofty grave Tragedians taught
 " In chorus or lămbic, teachers best
 " Of moral prudence, with delight receiv'd
 " In brief sententious precepts ; while they treat
 " Of fate, and chance, and change in human life,
 " High actions and high passions best describing."
 Next " to the famous orators repair
 " Those antient, whose resistless eloquence
 " Wielding at will that fierce Democratic
 " Shook th' arsenal and fulmin'd over Greece
 " To Macedon, and Artaxerxes' throne."

By the phrase " famous orators," the poet might possibly allude to the Athenian orators in general ; or he might distantly glance at the polished Isocrates, or Æschines the rival of Demosthenes ; but by the words " fulmin'd over Greece," I imagine he could mean nothing but what I call the thundering conciseness of Demosthenes himself ; and which I wish you to compare with the full sonorous studied periods of your admired Cicero.

" To sage philosophy next lend thine ear,
 " From Heav'n descended to the low-roof'd house
 " of Socrates ; see there his tenement,
 " Whom, well-inspir'd the oracle pronounc'd

" Wifest

“Wiseſt of men, from whoſe mouth iſſu'd forth
 “Melliſſuous ſtreams, that water'd all the ſchools
 “Of Academics, old and new.”

Milton was ſo fond of Socrates (the founder of moral philoſophy) that he has mentioned him once before in this poem: and he then intimated his ſuffering and death.—In conſidering the occaſional beauties that lie ſcattered up and down in *Paradiſe Regain'd*, like a few ſcanty flowers in a dry barren deſert; I cannot but do Milton juſtice to ſay, that in his deſcription of the ſeveral nations and empires of the world, he has adorned it with a profuſion of hiſtorical and geographical knowledge. And he has judiciously characterized the military glories of Rome “Imperial city on ſeven ſmall hills,” and cenſured the barbarous Gladiatorial exhibitions, &c. in the Cricenſian Shews or Games.

“their ſports to blood enur'd
 “Of fighting men, and men to beaſts expos'd-”

which he has contraſted with the civilized humanity, poliſhed taſte, ſcience, and liberal arts of Attica. Milton likewise ſeems ſo ſenſible of the ſublimer
 beauties

beauties of the sacred Scriptures, that he happily adverts to

“ The Hymns and Psalms with artful terms inscrib'd.”

And to

“ — the Hebrew songs, and harps in Babylon

“ That pleas'd so well the Victor's ears.”—

And again,

To “ Sion's songs to all true taste excelling.”

And, speaking of the inspired Prophets of Israel; he, with judgment particularizes

“ Their majestic unaffected stile.”

I also very much like the Tempest in the Wilderness, (vide Book the 4th) when

“ Either tropic now

“ 'Gan thunder,”

And when

“ Morning fair

“ Came forth with pilgrim steps in amice gray.”

And likewise, when

“ the

“ the birds

“ Who all things now behold more fresh and green

“ After a night of storm so ruinous,

“ Chear'd up their choicest notes in bush and spray,

“ To gratulate the sweet return of morn.”

Yours, &c. &c.

P. S. The death of Socrates (that philosophical martyr,) naturally leads, from the manner of it, to medical reflections; since it is well known that he was executed, as was the manner with the Athenian criminals) by being compelled to drink a quantity of the juice of hemlock, *κῶνιου*,* as the Greeks termed it. I cannot now recollect from what authority I give the anecdote; but I am very clear, that I have read it in some author;† that after Socrates had swallowed the usual quantity of poisonous juice,

I

the

* *Κῶνιου*, theme, *κωνος*, a cone. This conium is given as a genus by Linnæus; and the conium maculatum, the spotted hemlock, or what is now given under the name of cicuta, is only a species. It is remarkable that Galen, speaking of hemlock, pronounces it to be food for cranes, and poison for men; how strangely ancient and modern Doctors disagree!

† PLATO.

the executioner, or the man who prepared it, told him, that if he talked so much, it would be found necessary to give him another dose. Does not this in some measure, lead to a discovery of the effects, or *modus operandi*, of the poison? And may we not suppose, that the intense exertion of the philosopher's mind and voice in speaking loud, &c. might suspend, or for a time counteract the sedative and deleterious quality of the hemlock? Since Storch, an ingenious practitioner of Vienna, has published his Treatise on the salutary effects of the *Cicuta*, and some other reputed vegetable poisons; it has been the fashion to exhibit poisons as medicines; and this much at least may be said in favour of the practice; that as the most salutary medicines given injudiciously may act as poisons on some constitutions; so perhaps the most notorious vegetable and mineral poisons, judiciously exhibited in small quantities, may act as the most efficacious remedies in some desperate diseases. The *extractum cicutæ* is now much in vogue. I once had a fair opportunity of seeing its efficacy in the full extent. I know a gentleman who took it, without intermission, and without taking any other medicine whatever, for four or five months. He cautiously
began

began with a grain at a dose, and increased the quantity gradually. The medicine at first was very unpleasant, and had many disagreeable operations; it affected the head,* and was truly narcotic;† and was so far the reverse of opium, that it intoxicated without exhilarating. After some time the constitution was so habituated to the action of the cicuta, that the patient could take a dram or more at a dose, three or four times a day: he was by the faculty universally allowed to labour under a cancerous complaint; and such I believe it certainly was. I cannot say that he was by any means cured; but he was apparently, for the time at least, very much relieved. I noticed one particular; when the patient began with taking the extract of hemlock; his pulse beat 73 in a minute; whereas before he entirely discontinued the use of it, I frequently felt and measured his pulse by a stop

I 2

watch;

* It does not appear that Socrates was affected in his head; since he kept his senses and recollection to the last; by his dying words he coolly desired his friend to sacrifice a cock to *Æsculapius*, the God or Inventor of Medicine: If he intended to be jocular, I do not know but he might mean, that, respecting himself, medicine had done its best and its worst.

† Narcotic, a Greek word, literally signifies "stupifying," a term happily expressive of the effects of hemlock; but very improperly applied to opium, and some other soporifics.

watch; and it never exceeded 68 or 69. I have given you an authentic state of facts; comment on them at your pleasure.

LETTER XVII.

BOTANICAL KNOWLEDGE

OF

VIRGIL.

SIR,

IF I have carried you out of the road; in excuse for my deviation, you will recollect that you have been carried through Paradise; but I now bring you back to the pleasant page of Virgil. It is difficult to distinguish between the different agreeable sensations—I feel myself astonished at the amazing powers of Homer; yet I feel myself rather more pleased with the milder exertions of Virgil. His
finished

finished stile is like the correct colouring of a painting by Titian; the nearer you view it, and the closer and longer you examine, the more you will admire

Respecting the science of Virgil, you that are perfect Linnæan, will discover a number of Botanical beauties in the Virgilian description of herbs, that escape my notice. “Florentem cytisum” occurs more than once in the Eclogues—you who know that the herb is in flower almost every month in the year, will feel the propriety of the phrase. I remark in general, that most epithets joined to herbs, in the Pastorals, or the Georgics, are so far expressive of their qualities, that they may be almost said to give a short history of the herb, or plant, or shrub. Though I think there is one instance to the contrary; when, in the second Eclogue, Thestylis makes a mess of pottage for the reapers, fatigued with the intense heat of the sun, in the time of the Italian wheat harvest; she pounds up together garlick and wild thyme.

Allia Serpyllum quæ herbas contundit olentes.

The word “olentes” being of an ambiguous sense, and expressive of any strong smell, whether agreeable or disagreeable; the learned reader is left in doubt

whether he ought to refer to the foetor of the garlic or to the fragrance of the thyme.

Epic Poets have availed themselves of all the arts and sciences of the age in which they lived : and they have been likewise more or less prejudiced by the fashionable errors of the times. The Romans were a warlike illiterate people, and knew very little of natural causes and effects. Judicial astronomy, (a species of conjuring philosophy) was much the vogue at Rome; witness the great encouragement there given to Chaldean soothsayers, Jew-jugglers and Egyptian fortune-tellers. Virgil himself seems, to have been infected with this general infatuation. Augustus, for aught I know, might be weak enough to believe ; that, from the marks of the body, the configuration of the planets might be gathered : and that the marks likewise might be told by knowing the nativity. This accounts for the story, otherwise unaccountable, and yet well authenticated, by which we are informed, that Augustus had moles upon some part of his body, which Virgil made believe resembled the constellation called *Urfa Major*, and thence prophesied his future fame and glories. By the bye,
I think

I think that a great bear, the literal translation of "Urfa Major," was no bad emblem of a Roman Emperor. For by the most authentic historical account; Augustus, in the beginning of his reign, was very cruel and savage, before he was civilized by the harmonious numbers of Virgil and Horace; who, Orpheus-like, by their songs, transformed a brute into a man.

Yours, most abruptly.

LETTER XVIII.
GENERAL REMARKS
ON
VIRGIL.

SIR,

TO renew the subject of my last letter, you may recollect that Virgil was the son of some wandering astrologer, whose name is not delivered down in history.

Octavius

Octavius Cæsar, afterwards called Augustus, commenced his reign with some cruelties and barbarities, to be exceeded only by a Nero or Caligula. I shudder while I relate, (*horresco referens!*). Your penetration, I dare say, in one single instance, anticipates my reference to what I call the barbarous massacre of Cicero. You are much better versed in the Roman history than myself. He was, to the best of my recollection, the promoter of the Emperor's Advancement: What language then can describe his base ingratitude? When he (with seeming reluctance) consented to the death of Cicero, a Roman of the first learning, and at least, the second orator that the world had hitherto produced. The reigning Emperor was deeply versed in the Knowledge of prudential politics and self-interest; sensible therefore, perhaps too late, of an indelible stain on his character, he ever after patronized men of genius; but not all the charms of Virgilian and Horatian poetry could ever erase the record of an authentic historical fact, which will stigmatise Imperial ingratitude to latest posterity.

I fear that Virgil was somewhat of a Court sycophant.

phant. It was perhaps little short of treason, to mention the Republican orator at the Augustine court.

Virgil has, as far as he could with any decency, censured the railing eloquence of Cicero in his Philippics, under the scurrilous oration of Drances. The phrases, "*linguâ melior;*" "*frigida bello dextera,*" are to sarcastically and characteristically pointed to be misunderstood, even by a school-boy. Again, the prejudiced poet has refused to introduce Cicero in his Elysian Fields, though after the mention of Catiline's* punishment in Tartarus, he makes a visible chasm in the Roman history, by never alluding to the vigilant and consummate statesman, who preserved Rome from the most daring and dangerous conspiracy that ever threatened the Common Wealth. I can scarcely refrain from exclaiming—Much injured Cicero! Spite of an Imperial junto, and a Court-cabal, posterity shall continue to do justice to thy neglected name. For thy orations are, and will be, read and admired, as long as oratory shall be popular, or the Roman language intelligible.

* Vide *Æneid* the 8th, under the article "Shield of *Æneas*."

ble. You, Sir, will the more readily excuse this digression, since it is in favour of that Latin author, whom, of all others, you profess to admire. You will remember also, that your great friend Lord Mansfield, in his youth, formed his taste for oratory on the Ciceronian plan; as the late Lord Chatham formed his oratory on the plan of Demosthenes. And these British ornaments, both of them in their several capacities, approached nearer than any orators of the present age, to the models which they adopted. But enough of orators; let us return to the poet.

There are many wonderful things recorded of Virgil's extensive knowledge: by some he is said to have been an eminent florist; he is likewise said to have been so professed a naturalist, that he has solved more phænomena, and upon more solid principles than Aristotle in his physics. He is also recorded to have studied geometry, the most opposite of all sciences to a poetical genius, and the beauties of a lively imagination. He is again reported to have been a great geographer, and to have left us the finest description of antient Italy any where to be found; but here I must beg leave to stop a little. It is not
from

from panegyrical accounts of others ; but from the author's own works, that we can truly judge of his science.

Homer, who may be considered as the inventor of the Grecian geography, has described antient Greece so very accurately, (probably from his own observation in his travels) that he has been reckoned the father of the science. Virgil has described the antient states of Italy almost as accurately and poetically, (I say almost, for I think that upon the whole Homer has an apparent preference,) with this distinction ; that Virgil does not go on in a regular series of town after town, in the natural order that Homer does ; but frequently leaps from one city to another, sometimes at half the distance of Italy : though I do not think this a defect, when we consider that poets describe poetically, and are not confined to the dull regularity of a geographical map. Homer and Virgil were, both of them, what I call poetical landscape painters ; the former has included all his description in the catalogue of the ships ; whereas the latter has in fact given two catalogues ; the one at the conclusion of the 7th book, and the other,

other, that of the auxiliaries to the Trojans, in the 10th book. Both these landscape painters have given us occasionally entertaining scenes of many countries, drawn in their liveliest and most natural colours. We meander with them amid, a beautiful variety of towns, havens, forests, vineyards, groves, mountains, and rivers; and are perpetually amused with their observations on the different soils, products, situations, and prospects. But Virgil concludes his first catalogue with so beautiful and lively a description of the superior stature of Turnus—of his helmet, and of the heroine Camilla, with her horse-brigade, and that hyperbolical description of her swift motion; that I beg to be excused for giving you the original, together with Dryden's translation, on account of the pleasure that I feel in transcribing such poetical and heroical beauties.

*Ipse inter rimos præstanti corpore Turnus
Vertitur, arma tenens, & toto vertice supra est.
Cui triplici crinita jubâ galea alta Chimæram
Sustinet, Ætnæos efflantem faucibus ignes:
Tam magis illa fremens, & tristibus effera flammis,
Quam magis effuso crudescunt sanguine pugna.*

Amid the troops, and like the leading God,
 High o'er the rest in arms the graceful Turnus rode:
 A triple pile of plumes his crest adorn'd,
 On which with belching flames Chimæra burn'd;
 The more the winds his kindled course inspire,
 The more with fury burn'd the blazing fire.

*Hos super advenit Voscâ de gente Camilla,
 Agmen agmen equitum, & florentes ære catervas,
 Bellatrix: non illa colo calathisque Minervæ
 Fæmineas affeuta manus; sed prælia virgo
 Dura pati, cursuque pectus prævertere ventos.
 Illa vel intactæ segetis per summa volaret
 Gramina: hec teneras cursu læfisset aristas:
 Vel mare per medium, fluctu suspensa tumentis,
 Ferret iter, celeres nec tingeret æquore plantas.*

Last from the Voscians fair Camilla came,
 And led her warlike troops, a warrior dame:
 Unbred to spinning, in the loom unskill'd,
 She chose the nobler Pallas of the field.
 Mix'd with the first, the fierce Virago fought,
 Sustain'd the toils of arms, the danger fought.
 Outstrip'd the winds in speed upon the plain,
 Flew o'er the fields, nor hurt the bearded grain:

K

She

She swept the seas, and as she skimm'd along,
Her flying feet unbath'd on billows hung.

LETTER XIX.
REMARKS
ON THE
FOURTH ÆNEID.

*Nec legitur pars ulla magis de corpore toto,
Quam non legitimo fœdere junctus amor.* OVID.

SIR,

THE above quotation gives the sanction of the great Master of Love, to the superior excellency of this book; which is the shortest, and perhaps for that very reason, the most correct of any. I know not what the author may have copied from Apollonius Rhodius, having never read his poem; but shew me any thing in the comparatively languid Description of Circe or Calypso, that can anywise compare

compare with the noble and animated Episode of Dido; wherein every thing that is delicate in love is delineated at large; the beginning, the natural progress, the traverses, the inconsistencies, the contradictions, and fatal conclusion of the tender passion, are exhibited in most striking colours. But, as a proof that different geniuses in different ages and countries may describe alike, without any suspicion of servilely copying from each other: I remark, that the Virgilian Dido and Shakespeare's Desdemona are so far similar, that they both are captivated by the romantic tales, and "hair-breadth-scapes," of their several gallants; for Æneas might have exclaimed in the words of the noble Moor—

" She lov'd me for the dangers I had pass'd,

" And I lov'd her, that she did pity them."

Mark the impression that his narration made on his fair auditor

———— *hærent infixi pectore vultus*

Verbaque ———

" His words, his looks imprinted in her heart.—Dry.

And again.

— *Ilacofque iterum demens audire labores
Expoſcit, pendetque iterum norrantis ab ore.*

“ But ſtill in vain ;

“ For ſtill ſhe begs to hear it once again ;

“ The hearer on the ſpeaker’s mouth depends.”

DRYDEN.

In theſe laſt verſes we ſee the very figure and attitude of the attentive fair-one. I ſhall quote as little as poſſible ; for were I to attempt to delineate all the beauties, I might tranſcribe this whole book. It is a common phraſe in the mouths of modern critics to declare ſome productions below all criticiſm : but I think this whole Epiſode above all. The ſtile of the piece is ſo highly finiſhed, and ſo exquisitely correct, that you can hardly tranſpoſe a ſingle word, without injuring the beautiful order of verſification. It has been a common and a trite remark, that the poet in one part of this Book has changed the uſual epithet of his hero ; inſtead of “ *pious*,” he ſays,

*Speluncam Dido, Dux et Trojanus eandem
Deveniunt.*

As if in the cave ſcene he thought “ captain” a better travelling title than “ the pious man,” for his intriguing

triguing hero.—The ungrateful behaviour of the said pious Æneas, in deserting his enamoured hostess, has been censured by the fair sex in all ages: his plea of a mandate from Jove, by Mercury, the Messenger of the Gods, and all his other religious pretences, have not been sufficient to screen the base deserter from their resentment. For my own part, I think this conduct of the religious hero somewhat resembles the deportment of a modern Methodist preacher; brim-full of divinity, without a grain of humanity. Read the following:—pity the unfortunate Dido, and excuse, if you can, the obdurate heart of Æneas.

*Diffimulare etiam ipseasti perfide tantum
 Posse nefas: tacitusque meâ decedere terrâ?
 Nec te noster amor, nec te data dextera quondam,
 Nec moriturq tenet crudeli funere Dido?*

What says John Dryden's translation? Take his own words; though they are in this place more than usually inferior to the original:

“ Base and ungrateful could you hope to fly,
 “ And undiscover'd scape a lover's eye?

- " Nor could my kindness nor compassion move,
 " No plighted vows, nor dearer bands of love,
 " Or is the death of a despairing Queen,
 " Not worth preventing, tho' too well foreseen !

A circumstance very unexpected obliges me to break off this letter in the middle.

Yours, &c. &c.

LETTER XX.

FURTHER REMARKS

ON THE

FOURTH ÆNEID,

SIR,

THE Æneid has been called the Roman History, or Imperial Poem ; the latter title it merits as much as the former ; for the dignity of the Roman empire, and the person of the Roman Emperor, are every where supported. Virgil was so great an adept in the Chesterfieldian art of flattering politeness, that

he

he has complimented Augustus on the supposed possession of every virtue. he would be thought to have : and accordingly he has represented his hero to be every thing that the patron wished to be thought : and the piety of Æneis was meant to represent the highly religious character of Pontifex Maximus.

Few gentlemen understood Roman literature, or Roman history, better than yourself; and it is absolutely necessary so to do, to understand or relish the Beauties of the Æneid. Many of the first families, that flourished at Rome in the Poet's days, are complimented by having their names derived from some captains of ships, or leaders in the war; and no one can doubt but that the rash enterprising courage of Marc Antony, was represented under the heroic audacity of the unfortunate Turnus. These circumstances have been remarked by Dryden and others; as indeed they must be by every one who understands the history of the Romans. I think the Æneid in many instances to be very personal; and such it was most likely felt to be, in the age in which it was composed; and perhaps in the book before me, by the example or precedent of Æneis's deserting Queen

Dido:

Dido : the Courtier-bard might probably bring an instance, to excuse the separation that took place (about the time the fourth *Æneid* was written) between the Emperor and the repudiated Scribonia. And Dryden, or somebody else, (I now forget who) says, that Virgil drew this dimple in the cheek of *Æneis*, to prove Augustus to be of the same family, by so remarkable a feature in the same place, Was it peculiar, then, to the "*Divân Genus*," or the Godlike Julian race, to prove treacherous in love, and desert their wives or mistresses? By the bye I have often thought that the divine *Æneis* himself (*Vxorious* as he was called by Mercury) left his spouse behind him a little oddly; for whereas, on the burning of Troy, he brought off his father on his back, and led his son by his side; he left his wife to follow his steps as she could—mark his own words in his own narration—

—— *Longè servat vestigia conjux.*

She follow'd his footsteps, at a *long* distance.

And it is remarkable, likewise, that when the party reached the tomb of Ceres, the place appointed for their rendezvous, the unlucky Creusa was the only
indi-

individual missing of the whole numerous retinue—

—— *Collectis omnibus una*

Defuit ——

Many a modern soldier has lost his wife the same way—but, however, to do the pious prince all due justice; he was properly disconsolate upon the occasion; and could not go contented 'till he had measured back his weary steps over the ashes of burning Troy; and met the ghost of his wife, who informed him, that all was well with her, &c.

This letter, again,

Is so far like the bear and fiddle,

It breaks off short just in the middle.

Yours, &c.

LETTER

L E T T E R X X I .

T H E

D E A T H - W O U N D S

O F

DIDO, CAMILLA, AND RHÆTUS.

SIR,

YOU have often read and admired Fielding's incomparable novel of Tom Jones; and there you read, if I remember rightly, that Squire, or Justice Western, (call him which you will) when in close pursuit of his favourite daughter, accidentally meeting with a pack of hounds in full cry on the road, joined it, and left the further pursuit of his darling Sophia—I feel myself something in the same predicament; and may, with regard to inclination at least, exclaim with the Roman poet,

——— *Me dulces ante omnia Musæ.*

I confess myself likewise an amateur of every liberal art and science; but poetry, you well know, is my
hobby-

hobby-horse: no wonder, therefore, if it has carried me out of the road, in the dull death-hunting plan, on which I set out. But so much for digression,—let me return to the death-wound of Dido; she, we are told, stabbed herself with the Ænean sword, and

“ While in the wound the cruel weapon stands,

“ The spouting blood came streaming on her hands.”

Dryden, when he takes no unwarrantable liberties, and does not entirely omit a passage, translates the Æneid so much better than Pope does the Iliad, that I find it sometimes unnecessary to quote the original. But the precise situation of the wound is best specified in Virgil's own words—

—— *infixum stridet sub pectore vulnus.*

A wound of such magnitude under the breast, proves itself mortal, and that too from the most obvious cause, viz. the effusion of blood, to which the poet attributes almost all deaths; excepting these very few, in which the skull is fractured, and the brain originally injured. But the verses which describe the mode of Queen Dido's expiring, must so much strike you who have so often officially attended to
the

the last efforts of departing life, that I forbear any comment; read and judge for yourself.

*Ter sese attollens, cubitoque innixa levavit,
Ter revoluta toro est, oculisque errantibus, alto
Quæsit cælo lucem, ingenuitque repertâ.*

“ Thrice Dido try’d to raise her drooping head,
“ And fainting thrice, fell groveling on the bed;
“ Then ope’d her heavy eyes, and sought the light,
“ And having found it, sicken’d at the sight.”

Virgil is certainly inferior to Homer, in what some of the faculty call a renunciation of wounds; for the latter describes the individual part, in which the injury is received, with anatomical accuracy. But I think in the last instance, and in the death of my favourite heroine Camilla,* (which by the bye is an original character) that the Roman poet describes the act of death, and the mode of dying, with more beautiful circumstances than the Grecian. Indeed every thing is beautiful in the lovely Virago; and with a singular propriety she sacrifices her life to her female love of ornament: for while she followed Clorêus, the gaily dressed priest of Cybelè, “all
bright

* Vide *Æneid* the 11th.

bright in Phrygian arms," and conspicuous in his purple vest,"

" Him the fierce maid beheld with eager eyes,

" Fond and ambitious of so rich a prize."

DRYDEN.

which gave the artful dastardly Aruns an opportunity (unperceived) of infixing a javelin or spear, "*sub* mamillam*," under her pap. But by the elegant phrase of

Virgineumque altè bibit æta cruorem,

literally

" The dart deep-driv'n drank her Virgin blood,"

there needs no comment to prove this wound mortal. Peruse the following lines, and tell me if you do not almost see the beautiful amazon falling from her steed.

— *simul his dictis linquebat habenas,
Ad terram non sponte fluens; tum frigida toto
Paulatim evolvit se corpore, lentaque colla
Et caput lethò posuit caput; arma relinquens.
Vitaque cum gemitu fugit indignata per umbras.*

L

" She

* In these three instances alluded to in this letter, Virgil specifies the particular situation of the wounds, after the manner of Homer.

- " She said, and sliding, sunk upon the plain ;
 " Dying, her open hand forsakes the rein :
 " Short, and more short she pants ; by slow degrees
 " Her mind a passage from the body frees :
 " She drops the sword, she nods the pluming crest,
 " Her drooping head declining on her breast :
 " In the last sigh her struggling soul expires,
 " And mumm'ring with disdain, to stygian shades
 " retires.

DRYDEN.

I cannot conclude without remarking, that though the word " anima" is generally rendered " soul" and " vita" " life;" it is clear from this and some other passages in the *Æneid*, that the two words are by the poet sometimes used one for the other: or that they have a common signification. For in the concluding line of my last quotation, Dryden, and every other translator, renders " vita" " soul" and not " life;" indeed, it would be a solecism to say otherwise.

In the 9th *Æneid*, speaking of the death of Rhætus, in the Night Adventure of Nisus and Euryalus, the poet has the following singular phrase: *purpuream**

vomit

* There is a great propriety in the idea of a purple flood, as applied in this place, because the hero alluded to, must have bled profusely.

vomit ille animam,” “ he vomits his purple *soul*,” as is the general construction of the words : whereas I should say, “ he vomits his purple *life* ;” for I believe that “ *anima*,” in this place, means the living principle ; and which Virgil, and almost all the ancient physiologists supposed to reside in the blood. Lucretius, as a follower of Epicurus, might, for aught I know, suppose the soul to reside in the blood, and therefore to be mortal. But had Virgil adopted such principles, all the delightful scenes of his Elysium had been annihilated at once.

Yours, &c.

fully, since in the act of his rising to defend himself, he received all his adversary's sword full in his breast.

—— *totum cui cominus enses*

Condidit assurgenti ——

LETTER XXII.

ON

VIRGIL'S KNOWLEDGE

OF

HORSES.

Hic et ubique.

Now here, now there.

S I R,

IN my desultory observations on Virgil, I beg leave to screen myself, under the authority of his own example, in his account of the cities and towns of ancient Italy. I continue to remark, that the Latin poet understood and characterized animals more accurately than any other Poet whatever. The individual nature of no animal, from the lordly lion to the industrious bee, or the parsimonious ant, escaped his penetration ; and he is remarkable for his bold phrase in attributing human affections to the brute creation. It is an odd kind of phrase to say the horse is your hobby-

hobby-horse, though the idea is true ; and, to use another common phrase ; Virgil, as a physician for horses, was quite at home in his Veterinarian capacity.

Homer has described those noble animals, horses, in strong general terms ; he sometimes says, “ they are whiter than snow, and swifter than the winds ;” and deduces their pedigree with the accuracy of a Newmarket jockey, and frequently makes his heroes address them as capable of reflection. But to endow them with human sentiment, was an honour reserved for the improving genius of the Roman bard. In proof of my observation, peruse the 3d Georgic—remark the choice of a colt, from his fiery spirit.

“ The first to lead the way, to tempt the flood,

“ To pass the bridge unknown, nor fear the trembling
“ wood.”

Mark the same when he became a horse of war,

*Tum si qua sonum procul arma dedere
Stare loco nescit, micat auribus, & tremit artus,
Collectumque premens volvit sub naribus ignem.*

- " The fiery courser, when he hears from far
 " The sprightly trumpet, and the sound of war ;
 " Erects his ears, and trembling with delight,
 " Shifts pace and paws ; and hopes the promis'd
 " fight.
 " On his right shoulder his thick mane reclin'd,
 " Ruffles at speed, and dances in the wind :
 " His horny hoofs are jetty black and round,
 " His chine is double ; starting with abound
 " He turns the turf,* and shakes the solid ground ;
 " Fire from his eyes, clouds from his nostrils flow,
 " He bears his rider headlong on the foe."

There is nothing similar (for a reason I will assign you hereafter) and nothing equal, that I recollect, in all the Iliad or Odyssey ; the Virgilian war-horse is most beautiful ; but in animation inferior to the oriental steed described by the Man of Uz.* " He has his neck cloathed with thunder—the glory of his nostrils is terrible—he rejoiceth in his strength—he swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage—he smelleth the battle afar off—he says among the trumpets ha ! ha !" These are images which no language but the oriental is capable of expressing.—

Peruse

* Job.

Peruse again Virgil's description of the Chariot-race, and that particular verse

Tantus amor laudum, tantæ est victoria curæ.

Where the running-horse is announced to be susceptible of praise, and ambitious of victory. Mark again, in the inimitable description of the murrain, or the plague among cattle, how he portrays the diseased horse.

*Labitur infelix studiorum, atque immemor herbæ
Victor equus —*

“ The Victor-horse, forgetful of his food,

“ The palm renounces, and abhors the food.”

More of this hereafter.

Yours, &c. &c.

LETTER

LETTER XXIII.

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS.

S I R,

I Am at last honoured with your single favour, by way of answer to six or seven of my letters: though short, it is to me as precious as the leaf of the Sibyl. I feel myself highly flattered by your attention and approbation. In answer to your further questions respecting your great favourite Milton: I do not think so highly of some of his puerile compositions* in Latin verse, as you seem to do. I think I have read more elegant compositions of the sort by some boys of Eaton, Westminster, or Winchester, at the age of fifteen: in short, Milton's genius in his earlier productions seems to me to be like

* The weakest of all Milton's poetical attempts, are his juvenile Translations of some of the Psalms of David, which are not a thousand degrees superior to those by Sternhold and Hopkins. Some of Milton's juvenile Latin verses however possess a strong spirit of poetry, though not expressed in elegant versification.

like crude hard fruit, which wants time to mellow it into maturity. Besides, I believe it a true as well as trite remark, that great geniuses seldom execute little things well: Milton's sonnet on the Nightingale, is far exceeded by that of our fair country-woman Mrs. Robinson. You express yourself pleased with, what you call, my poetical Eulogium on the virtues of the Peruvian bark; but you say you have ever found the *extractum cicutæ* to be a churlish untractable medicine, and hardly ever knew any good effect from its use; and seem to think that either Dr. Storck, of Vienna, exaggerates his account of the salutary effects of the herb; or that the hemlock of Germany is not of the same nature with that of Great-Britain. I very lately conversed with a young student of medicine, who came from Vienna; he says that the *cituta* which grows in the neighbourhood of Vienna resembles as nearly as possible that which grows in the neighbourhood of London. I have likewise lately seen a country surgeon of some eminence, who assures me, that he once knew a patient apparently cured of a cancer on his lip by a long indefatigable perseverance in the use of the extract of hemlock. This hardened hero in the
medicine

medicine-taking way, persevered until he took an ounce in 24 hours. I am likewise informed of another patient, who persevered in the same hardy course; he also appeared to be recovering fast, but before he proceeded to take half an ounce in a day, he unluckily died of the medicine. If you mean to publish your sentiments at large upon the subject, (as I suspect you do) I have, agreeably to your earnest request, given all the intelligence I can collect. By your desire I shall continue my correspondence without intermission.

Yours, &c.

L E T T E R XXIV.

O N

V A R I O U S S U B J E C T S.

S I R,

IT never rains but it pours, says the old adage.—
I feel myself highly honoured by your two letters, the one so unusually quick upon the receipt
of

of the other.—You flatter me highly on the novelty of my undertaking, in attempting as you term it, to try Homer and Virgil, by the test of their knowledge in the liberal arts and sciences.

When I consider your eminent skill in your favourite study of Botany, I express myself highly pleased, that you condescend to approve of those numerous instances of Virgil's knowledge of the nature of herbs, that I have given you out of the Eclogues and Georgics. I now give another out of the 4th Æneid:—" *Soporiferumque papaver,*" "the soporiferous poppy," says Virgil. The single epithet of "*soporiferum,*" gives an history of the medical effects of the poppy, equal to some volumes. You add likewise, that I have carried you (in your own complimentary phrase) delightfully through the Virgilian Elysian fields; and agree with me in your decided opinion of the inferiority of the Homeric Elysium, as exhibited in the Odyssæy.

The 6th Book of the Æneid I have ever admired beyond any part of the whole; and you now clearly perceive the beautifully-poetical use that the author there makes of the sublime and mysterious doctrines
of

of the pre-existence and transmigration of souls; as taught by the Grecian philosophers, Pythagoras and Plato.

Look upon this short letter as a kind of hasty acknowledgement only of your last.—More in my next.

Yours, &c.

TO the READER.

Several Letters on the Botanical Knowledge of Virgil, and on the Beauties of the 6th *Æneid*, are either mislaid, or lost entirely.

LETTER

LETTER XXV.

FURTHER REMARKS

ON THE

SIXTH ÆNEID.

A WORD in your ear, Doctor ! I hope, that in your agreeable passage through the Elyfian Fields, you did not meet with any of your own patients. I told you in a former letter, that no physicians were there admitted. I now recall that rash declaration, as I think the gentlemen of the Faculty are manifestly included under the following article :

“ Inventas aut qui vitam excoluere per artes.”

“ Among those worthy characters, who adorned or
“ preserved life by invented arts.”

Homer, both in the Iliad and Odyſſey, ſcarcely
ever mentioned a phyſician or ſurgeon without giv-

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ing

ing some little encomium upon the usefulness of the healing art. Virgil has been more sparing of his compliments; but he has once done it handsomely, in the phrase of

Phæbo ante alios dilectus Iæpis." *

For when we consider Phœbus, in his capacity as the God of Medicine; the Army surgeon was not a little flattered in being declared to be beloved of such a celestial personage. I observe, that whoever is compared with Homer, must be found inferior in some respect or other.

All antiquity has admired his conduct, in making the stern Ajax walk off in contemptuous and indignant silence from Ulysses, when accosted by him in the infernal regions: Virgil has copied this circumstance a little injudiciously in the conduct of his Dido (in the myrtle-grove) to the treacherous Æneas.

My great friend, the late Dr. Johnson, in some of his incubations or essays, has, with his usual judgment,

* By these words, Virgil is supposed to allude to Antonius Musa, the favourite Physician of Augustus.

ment, pointed out the absurdity of attributing that sullen behaviour to a talkative female, which only became a furly warrior, or something to that effect. But the learned Doctor, or any other critic, must have the eyes of a lynx to discover such another superiority in what I call the weakest part of the *Odyssey*. I have not the original now by me, nor any translation whatever? but, according to my best recollection, the ghosts of Achilles and Agamemnon are two dead hands for a long story: and the former, from some phrases that drop from him, seems to give no very exalted idea of the pleasures of a future state; this is more wonderful, when we consider that Homer collected most of his learning, during his travels in Egypt, from the same sources from which Pythagoras and Plato derived their sublimer, but mysterious notions of the pre-existence and immortality of the soul.

Why I do not notice the remarkable words, "*his dantem jura Catonem*," in the 6th Æneid, is for the most obvious reason in the world; because no such words occur in that whole Book. "*Quis te magne Cato tacitum?*" is all that is there mentioned.

Your quotation is only to be found in the 8th *Æneid*, where the poet paints (if I may be allowed such an expression) the Elysian Fields on the shield of *Æneas*, however, this mention of a Cato shews that the Courtier-bard was not afraid to celebrate a patriot in the heart of his Imperial poem; for that seems to be the true title, since the reigning Emperor is every where the God of his idolatry. But I confess I scarcely know which Cato is alluded to, with any degree of certainty; I should suppose Cato of Utica, at all hazards, were it not that we are expressly told, that those who laid violent hands upon themselves were (according to the Platonic doctrine) punished in Tartarus. Is Cato the Censor then referred to? I confess my ignorance; do you inform me. You say that the Emperor Augustus was a man of real taste: I know he is reported so to be by the historians of his own times, as well as by the poets; but I perceive clearly, that he was a keen politician, which is enough for my purpose, for I believe that all princes, kings, and governors, of every denomination, if they have possessed any share of good sense, whether their taste were good or bad, have found it
their

their interest to patronize not only the muses, but likewise every liberal art and science; and by such wise conduct have acquired present popularity—have supported their power and authority more effectually, than by armed legions; and have established their fame to latest posterity; such distinction is reserved for those whom Genius delighteth to honour!

Yours, &c. &c.

LETTER XVI.

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS.

SIR,

TO return from my long digression. It is very clear that neither saddle horses nor cavalry were used at the siege of Troy; but both were in use in other parts of the world, particularly in Egypt,

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long

long before that period. For when the children of Israel came out of that land, the sacred historian informs us, that Pharoah pursued them with his horsemen and his chariots.

At what period the war-horse was introduced into Latium, or antient Italy, is not, I believe, any where ascertained ; therefore, Virgil might not be guilty of any great breach of the customs of antiquity, by introducing troops of horse in the fights between the Latins and Trojans ; if it be such, I forgive him, as I do for the anachronism in the Episode of Dido, for the agreeable use he has made of both.

It has been said, that Virgil's heroes seldom or never fight from their chariots ; and that they were used for state only, as in the instance of King Latinus, who was drawn by four horses ; but this is a mistake.

Virgil's heroes do not often fight in their chariots ; but read the 12th *Æneid* in particular, and there you will find that Turnus fights from his chariot, and makes great slaughter of the flying foe.

— *salutem*

—— *saltaque superbus*

*Emitat in currum, & manibus molitur habenas,
Multa virum volitans dat fortia corpora Letho,
Semineces volvit multos, aut agmina curru
Proterit.——*

In literal translation, \

—— he vaults with haughty leap
Into his car—guides in his hands the reins;
Many brave bodies in his flying speed
He gives to death; many half dead he rolls,
Or with his chariot wheels breaks through the ranks.

And again,

—— *spargit rapida ungula rores*

Sanguineos, mixtaque cruor calcatur arena.

The sanguine dewes his horses' rapid hoofs
Disperse—and gore is spurn'd with sand commix'd.

At the present writing I have neither Virgil nor Dryden's translation to refer to; but carry on your attention to the "*Lusus Trojæ*," as described in the 5th *Æneid*, and you will perceive how the several horses of the young Ascanius and of the other two leaders of the three brigades, are distinguished from

from each each other. But above all attend to the warrior steed introduced as a mourner in the funeral procession of the young Pallas.*

*Post Bellator Equus, positis insignibus, Æthon
It lachrymans.——*

In this instance human sympathy is boldly attributed to the dumb animal.—But of all the Virgilian animals, I feel myself most delighted with the tame deer of Sylvia, which was smitten with an arrow from the bow, guided by the rash hand of the young Ascanius, and made the cause of the war.

Cervus erat formâ præstanti, &c.

But mark when it returns, with the arrow in its side, to the fond mistress—

Atque imploranti similis.——

Like to one imploring—says the Poet.

——— “ The big round tears

“ Cours’d one another down his innocent nose

“ In piteous chace ———

* Æneid the 11th:

* It is a curious circumstance in Natural History, that the genus *cervorum*, or the deer kind, are actually furnished with the lachrymal glands.

says

says our English Dramatist, upon somewhat of a similar occasion.

I have already observed at large, in my comments on the 6th *Æneid*, a great similarity of design in Virgil, and in Shakespear's Tragedy of Macbeth; such coincidence of thoughts in the poet of art, and the poet of nature, is a little extraordinary.—Here I can likewise treat you with a wound, and a most judicious one it is. It was necessary, for the conduct of the poem, that the deer should be wounded mortally, and yet in such a manner as to admit of a return home from the wood, where it was roused by the Trojan hounds; an arrow that pierced the flank and the womb, does all this admirably. Attend to the Poet's own words.

Perque UTERUM sonitu perque ilia venit arundo.
Æneid 7th.

The uterus, in its contracted state, in all female animals, is, I believe, in general, pretty well guarded from external injuries by the protection of the pelvis. I cannot say I well understand the comparative anatomy of the deer-species; but by an operation I have

have seen performed on a female fawn, the womb projects but very little, if any thing, before the pelvis; and therefore, the arrow must have come in a direction from the head to the flank, to pierce deeply, (if at all) the uterus; and such, I suppose, was Virgil's meaning.

P. S. The grammarians may tell us what they please of *hic cervus*, a buck, and *hæc cerva* a doe-deer; but it is pretty clear, that *cervus* must here mean a female. Almost all commentators, and translators likewise, have made this animal a male, and called it a stag; but if the *uterus* be not a sufficient proof of the female sex in all animals, I humbly ask pardon of those learned gentlemen for my daring singularity of opinion: What thinks my learned friend? Is further proof necessary? This part of the 7th Book is likewise distinguished by the first wound received (in battle) in the *Æneid*.

Almon, the son of Tyrrheus, the game-keeper to King Latinus, is wounded by an arrow, in a part and in a manner nearly similar to the death-wound

of

of Hector; with this difference, that the wind-pipe appears here to be divided—

— *hæsit enim sub gutture vulnus, & udæ*

Vocis iter, tenuemque inclusit sanguine vitam.

Which of course deprived the warrior of all power of speech; and accordingly the judicious Virgil has not made him utter any dying oration. The death, as usual, by Virgil, is attributed to the effusion of blood; though, as I have already observed,* it might proceed from another cause likewise. But the nervous system was not enough known in Virgil's day, to enable him to assign any other reason than mere loss of blood.

Respecting those evidently mortal wounds in the brain, by fracture of the skull, &c. Virgil has not above five or six of them in the whole *Æneid*; and one of the most remarkable and singular occurs in the 9th Book, and shews the temper of the sword of Turnus; and the vigour of his arm, to an extravagant degree; for with one stroke, he cuts sheer through the head of
that

* Vide Death-Wound of Hector. Vol. II.

that gigantic youth Pandarus, in such a manner, that the divided parts of it hung in equal portions, from either shoulder. The description has something so very picturesque, that I give it you in the Poet's own language, for no other can express it.

— *altè confurgit in ensem ;*

Et mediam ferro gemina inter tempora frontem

Dividit, impubesque immani vulnere malas ;

Fit sonus , ingenti concussa est pondere tellus :

Collapsos artus atque arma cruenta cerebro

Sternit humi moriens : atque illi partibus æquis

Huc caput atque illuc humero ex utroque pependit.

What think you of this wound for a novelty ! It appears to me to be just within the bounds of poetical probability : but I think that the Rutulian prince must have been “ a right good marksman,” to hit the longitudinal or strait future of the skull so exactly. There was, however, some English champion (I now forget his name*) who is said, on the faith of

* Hugh de Courey, Earl of Ulster. He lived in the reign of King John ; in whose favour he appeared as a champion, but no one man in the whole Kingdom of France was hardy enough to encounter him.

of authentic history, to have done something nearly similar ; for he made it his usual practice to divide a proof helmet, or head-piece, all through at one stroke of his broad-sword—his sword must have carried a good edge.

LETTER XXXVII.

A

VARIETY OF WOUNDS.

SIR,

THE nature of the ancient weapons of war, and the wounds thereby inflicted, were so entirely different from those of modern times; and the strength of the ancient warriors was supposed to be so great in the Heroic Age, that one can scarcely, at this distance of time, tell what recorded exertions are probable, and what not. Soon after the last instance that I gave you out of the 9th Book; a similar and still more extraordinary one occurs of the vigour of

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the

the arm of the aforesaid Turnus. Lynceus was the fatal instance; for while he opposed the Rutillian Prince in the rapid career of his man-killing fury—

Huic uno dejectum cominus ictu

Cum galea longè jacuit cahut—

here the Hero's head, helmet and all, flew off at one stroke. This is again what I call picturesque description, and as such, has a beautiful effect in poetry; and let that suffice, for the honour of the Poet. But, in this singular instance, the assistance of a Deity luckily interposes; for we are told just before, that Imperial Juno had infused præternatural power into her favourite hero. How far Virgil did or did not understand the nervous system,* may be the object of future speculation: it is sufficient in all these cases that he knew, "when the brains were out, the man would die." Turn back a little in the 9th Book, and you will find another of those singular-circumstanced wounds. A Hero, (I beg his pardon for not remembering his name) having received a slight wound

* That he did not distinguish the arteries from the veins, is clear from hence, *salientem sanguine veneam*. Geo. iii. The word *Salientem* being applicable only to an Artery.

wound in his side, dropped his shield, and applied his hand to the wounded part, when, lo? another arrow nailed his hand to his side.—*Abdita et intus*

Spiramenta animæ letali vulnere rupit—

If I understand this matter rightly, Virgil makes this wound mortal, from the injury received in the lungs themselves, and the sudden stoppage of the breath. There is even yet another novel wound, described in the proverbially beautiful Episode of Nifus and Euryalus, in the same Book. Nifus, in revenge for his beloved Euryalus, makes his desperate way through all obstacles, to the murderer (if we may so deem him) of his friend; and while Volscenes is clamouring aloud—

Ensem—

—— *Rutuli Clamantis in ore*

Condidit adverso.

He (Nifus) stabbed him deeply in the mouth, or rather in the throat, with the point of his sword. And when we consider what a tremendous weapon the ancient broad-sword was, and the violence with which it was thrust, you will easily perceive, with-

out any comment of mine, why this wound should be mortal, and speedily so. Virgil is so fond of this wound, that he repeats it again with little alteration.

Viz.—*Clamantis fistit in ore,—*

As a further proof, that in most death-wounds in the throat, Virgil understands the wind-pipe to be divided. Peruse the following—

—*Dryodem ferit eminus hastâ
Sub mentum graviter pressâ, pariterque loquendi
Vocem, animumque raptit, trajecto gutture.*

In this instance, the wind-pipe must have been evidently cut through, since the whole substance of the throat was pierced by the spear. Among other uncommon and extra-wounds, you are referred to the following:

Semianimesque micant digiti ferrumque retractant.

In this case the fingers continue to grasp and re-grasp (for such is the force of the verb *retractant*) the steel or sword, after the hand was severed from the arm. Is this circumstance natural or not? Do the muscles

muscles continue, *their former action, for some little time* after they are deprived of the nervous influence ?

Your's, abruptly.

P. S. One more on your favourite subject of horses.—Horace says, *bonis est in Equis patrū virtus*, that in good horses there is the virtue of their fires : whereas Virgil, the great Veterinarian of Roman antiquity, asserts, speaking of all animals,

Corpora præcipuè matrū legat

If by “corpora” he means, (as I suspect he does) what jockies call size, I agree with him ; for I believe it is in general pretty true, that almost all animals, however they partake of the spirit and shape of the fathers, generally possess the size or magnitude of their mothers. You may remark in most families, where the matron is large, let the good man be as diminutive as he may, the children are almost always large-sized. This is clearly exemplified in a family that you and I know ; and where, at first sight, I have sometimes taken the father for one of his younger sons. I am not altogether unacquainted with the comparative anatomy of the horse : I observe, as I believe

believe every body else must do, that the intestinal canal is longer in proportion in that animal than in any other of the same dimensions ; and this I take to be the true reason why purgative medicines act so slowly when administered to horses. I remark likewise that the brain of a horse is comparatively small in quantity. I observe the same of the dog ; and yet horses and dogs are (the elephant excepted) the most docile, sagacious, and (if I may be allowed such an expression) the most intelligent animals of the Brute Creation.

LETTER XXXVIII.

ON

ANTIENT NEUROLOGY.

SIR,

I HAVE often thought of what use were the common soldiers in the heroic age ? Since the plebeians never killed any of the enemy, that we read
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of, either in Homer or Virgil; and on the first reflection, we might be induced to suppose, that in antient Greece or Troy, the battalion men stood still to see their leaders fight. But however the highest flights of romantic fancy must some how be reconciled to common sense. Homer speaking of the extra exploits of his heroes, attributes them partly to the *αἰ διαμυρε* to those about them. And this phrase, as well as I remember, is particularly applied to the two Ajaxes. I humbly conceive that this gives a clue to unravel the whole poetic mystery; for instance, Achilles commanded a troop of myrmidons, and whatever actions were performed by the troop at large, were attributed to their commander: so of all the rest of the heroes, in the Trojan and Italian wars. And I observe likewise, that when some of the first rate heroes in the Iliad and Æneid, rise in their military ferocity, they kill men so very fast; that if they had quietly submitted their throats to be cut, or their brains to be knocked out; the heroical executioners could not have dispatched their enemies with more expedition; and the Muse is often invoked to record those slaughters: they tell well in heroic verse,

verse, and having the sanction of Homer and Virgil, and every other epic bard; no critics dares to dispute the prerogative; and for which they have a kind of patent from Apollo, the professionary God of their inspiration.

In the 10th book, now before me, the pious Æneas exhibits a striking proof of the truth of my observations: for on his first appearance in the war, he makes his military *debüt*, and handsells his Vulcanian sword, by killing, indiscriminately, almost every man that has the ill fate to come in his way. I am likewise stopped in my career: for what have we here unexpectedly?—Read with me.

Dexteraque ex humero NERVIS moribunda pependit—

“the dying hand hangs from the shoulder by the nerves or tendons; this is the first express mention of nerves in the Æneid, and naturally leads me to the dark subject of the Antient Neurology: as what I mean to say may be almost included in a nutshell; if I am erroneous, I will be concisely so. For I really believe, however novel the notion may be, that the word nerve obtained its appellation from its
resemblance

resemblance to a bow-string ; for though the nerves must necessarily have been prior to bow-strings, yet the use of the bow was prior to the discovery of the nerve. η *νευγη* * was the appropriated Greek word for the string of the bow ; and from thence was formed the word *το νευγον*, which in all old medical writers signifies nerve, tendon, or any round ligament promiscuously. For want of this knowledge I have heard some modern anatomists affect to ridicule the Stagyrte, with respect to his mention of the nerves of the heart : whereas, though but an indifferent anatomist, he was correctly and scientifically right in his observation ; since he clearly means, the strong tendinous fibres of the heart.

Aristotle did not even know that any nerves at all originated from the brain ; and therefore could not possibly allude to the *par vagum*, or any other nerves that might supply the heart : but only to those well known strong tendons, that make a constituent part of that noble muscle, and assist in its dilatation
 and

* *νευγη* ; whatever some Lexographers may say to the contrary, neither *νευγη* nor *νευγον* are themes but both are derived from *νεω* to twist, spin, or weave ; or from *κινω*, to nod, or move.

and contraction. In fact, the Greek philosophers, physiologists, and physicians, had little or no idea of the difference between what we now call nerve, tendon, or ligament; for, which ever of the three had the appearance of a string, was known by the common appellation of nerve. But some modern critics have extended this idea too far, when they suppose that Galen and some other writers, meant to comprehend the flat and capsular ligaments, under the general term of nerves. If this were the case, the complicated wound of *Æneas*, might be explained in a few words; but your knowledge of the Greek language will teach you, that nothing was called nerve by the antients, but what was round, and like a twisted cord.

Your's.

LETTER

LETTER XXXIX.

ON

ANTIENT NEUROLOGY.

SIR,

WHILE writing my last letter, I fancied that I understood Antient Neurology, but I now find myself a little confused on that intricate subject: and it is no wonder, if we, at this distant period, should not understand the antient Physiologists, since it is not quite clear that they understood themselves. For it is very singular, that after what we now call the nerves, were found to originate from the brain; they should continue (in their appellations) to confound them with the tendons. And therefore the method to understand the old Neurology, is to carry this remark with you; that under the general term of nerves, the Grecian anatomists comprehended not only what we now call the nervous system, but all tendinous extremities of muscles, indiscriminately, and all such ligaments of the joints as were round, or any wise like a bow-string,

string, or indeed any other string : but it is pretty clear, as I have already remarked, that the flat or capsular ligaments, were never included under the above description. I have often thought, that the man who first found out the communication of the nerves with the brain, made as great a discovery as he who discovered the circulation of the blood.

Let us consider a little what the Greek physicians or philosophers knew of this matter. Hippocrates was the father of the medical art, and perhaps the most successful practitioner that the world ever produced : his penetration was beyond description, but he had little or no opportunity of improving in anatomy : otherwise he could not have failed to have traced the nerves back to their origin in the brain. But this discovery was very imperfectly (if at all) to be attributed to the divine old man of Cos : some of his detached remarks tend very near towards it ; but when we come to consider them at large, we shall find, that not in words only, (for that would be immaterial) but even in his ideas he made no distinction between nerve and tendon. Perhaps
never

never any man possessed a more comprehensive mind than Aristotle ; he was a man of almost universal genius, and likewise of the greatest learning that antient Greece ever produced : Alexander the Great did himself more honour by keeping him as a preceptor, than by any other action he ever performed in his boasted conquest of the world. But in the matter before us, (I most humbly beg the philosopher's pardon for the daring assertion) he seemed to know, what I call, less than nothing : for, in the name of wonder, how is it possible, that possessing so fine a head, he should not even know that it contained brain ? For he looked upon that noblest part to be a fungus substance, composed of earth and water, and to be void of blood, and destitute of sensation.

Herophilus or Erasistratus, one or other, or both of them, were the first who knew the true and genuine office of the brain and nerves, or at least the uses ascribed to them by all succeeding anatomists. These two men are supposed to have been co-temporaries ; though, as Herophilus was the elder, from that and some other circumstances, it appears pro-

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bable that he was the discoverer. He lived in the reign of that great patron of learning Ptolomy Soter, otherwise known by the name of Ptolomy the son of Lagus. It is generally believed that he was born at Carthage, but that he made his dissections at Alexandria in Egypt. All the works of these two anatomical physicians, are now lost; but some extracts of them are preserved in the volumes of Galen, and some other medical writers. They were likewise the first that dissected men; for all anatomists before them had only examined brutes. Both of these traced the nerves, or at least some nerves, from the brain. It is enough for my purpose, that Herophilus discovered the optic nerves, though he called them optic pores, from a supposition that they were hollow: but it is affirmed, that he retracted this opinion on better information. It little signified what name he gave to them, he certainly describes them as nerves. This man not only tells us, that the nerves derived their origin from the brain, like so many branches from a common trunk; but likewise, that they were a part of the medulla spinalis,

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I could ever wish to judge an author by his own words. Rufus the Ephesian, an eminent writer, who lived about the reign of the Emperor Trajan, has preserved the words of Herophilus. Speaking of what we call the true nerves, he calls them, *αἰσθητικὰ καὶ προαιετικά* * *νεῦρα* the sensitive or voluntary nerves: or in other words, those that serve the purposes of sensation and voluntary motion. But this same author, though clear in idea, runs into the same verbal confusion with Hippocrates, when he says there are three sorts of nerves: by the two last, he must either mean tendons or ligaments, or be guilty of a great inconsistency, by supposing one power of motion to reside in the muscles themselves. Such is the almost inexplicable mystery caused by the ancient anatomists, in confounding nerve, tendon, and ligament, under one general term; and that too in a language so unequivocally explicit as the Greek: in which there was *ἑνὸν* the appropriated

O 2

word

* This word derived from *προαίεω*, may be rendered in Latin, *propono*, to propose; or *præpono*, to put or prefer one thing before another; and consequently implies either volition or intelligence, or perhaps both: the one being the consequence of the other.

word for tendon; and *συνδεσμος*, † the appropriated term for ligament.

A word more of the Stagyrte. This father of the art of logic, was lead into most unaccountably erroneous notions, through his ignorance of the nervous system: he supposed that the *spina dorsi*, or what is vulgarly called the back-bone, contained marrow, like any other bone of the limbs; and even to this day, we call the contents of the spinal vertebræ *medulla spinalis*: and thus by a learned absurdity, retain the antient appellation expressive of a false idea, even after the true one is clearly understood. It is evident likewise from Aristotle's entire ignorance of the nerves deriving their origin from the brain, that Hippocrates never made that discovery; for if he had, the notion could never have been lost so soon; and the Greek philosopher, who borrowed so much from the Greek physician, would most certainly have adopted the new discovery, if any such had been found in the Hippocratic writings. As the

great

† *συνδεσμος* is derived from *δυν*, *cum*; and *δεω*, *ligo*; to bind together; and from *ligo*, is formed the Latin word *ligamentum*, a ligament.

great metaphysical philosopher knew nothing of the brain, he was of course greatly at a loss how to account for sensation; he therefore supposed the heart to be the seat of the soul; and I believe he made it the reservoir of the animal spirits, and consequently the origin of motion and sensation. But in other parts of his works he seems to think the flesh the proper organ of Sensation; though he could not but perceive, that motion was performed by the nerves, as he calls them, by which word, beyond all dispute, here again, he must mean tendons, or the extremities of muscles. The misfortune of Aristotle was, that though one of the most acute reasoners in the world; he had no true premises or data to reason from; therefore I say, that with all his errors, had he lived in the present improved state of anatomy, he would have been the greatest professor in that science that the world has ever produced. And if I am not very much mistaken, even in his dark age, he made some weak efforts towards the discovery of the lacteals at least, if not of the lymphatic or absorbent system. But if what authors say, concerning Herophilus be true, he came very near indeed

towards making a discovery, which has caused so much noise in the present age, and the honour of which has been claimed by so many: so true it is, that though any discovery may be new to the discover, it is no reason why it may not have been known before; and in this sense, perhaps, there is nothing completely new under the sun.

LETTER XL.

O N

ANTIENT NEUROLOGY

S I R,

HOMER certainly knew little or nothing of the nervous system, which was not discovered in antient Greece in his early day; and therefore, if he did know it at all (and it does not appear in his works that he did) he must have borrowed this knowledge from some of the Egyptian sages, during his abode in their country, which was at that time the fruitful nursery

nursery of universal science. Virgil,* considering the age in which he lived, ought to have learned that the nerves originated from the brain: and I verily believe that he did possess this information, though he has not displayed it in any of his poems. He uses "*nervus*," for a bow-string, nerve, or tendon, promiscuously: and once in the 9th Æneid, by the phrase, *numerosque intendere nervis*: he clearly means the strings of a musical instrument. And indeed, all the Roman writers use the word in the same ambiguous sense. For as the two Greek words *νευρον* and *νευρον*, were both of them expressed by the single word "*nervus*," that appellation was used in more different senses, than almost any other in the Latin language. But I think that Horace had more insight into the nervous system, and was a much better physician than Virgil. What think you of the following?

Diſtaque

• As Virgil studied at Athens, and understood Greek so well; it is hardly probable that he should not have availed himself of the medical science of the Greek writers: for I believe the writings of Herophilus were in being at that time, and in great vogue. Cicero mentions them with much respect, and, if I mistake not, alludes to them as existing in his time.

*Diſtaque ceſſantem nervis elidere morbum
Sulphura. —*

“Sulphureous waters ſaid to diſperſe the malady lingering on the nerves!” And can any language better expreſs what is now called, in the fashionable phraſe, a ſlow nervous diſorder? That ſulphureous* waters are friendly to the nerves, was an antient doctrine: and this is, in ſome meaſure confirmed by the action of the Bath waters, ſo very ſalutary to the nervous influence. For, whatever the wit or ridicule of Dr. Lucas may have ſuggeſted to the contrary, the waters of all the different hot baths at Bath, are known to contain more or leſs ſulphur; though not in any particular form, which that very ingenious Chemiſt could diſcover in his analyſis. The commencement of the Horatian epiſtle to Numonius Vala, (as far as it is intelligible through a period † of

* The ſulphureous waters here alluded to, aroſe ſomewhere near the lake Avernus; though (as Francis obſerves) the poet here more particularly means, the ſtoves, where the ſulphureous vapours, exhaling from the earth, cauſe a dry heat, which promotes perſpiration.

† This is perhaps a ſtriking ſingular inſtance of the moſt conſuſed ſentence in all Horace’s works; for he is, in general, not only a moſt pleaſant and agreeable, but likewiſe as clear and intelligible an author as any which the Auguſtine age has produced.

of a mile, and a parentheſis within a parentheſis) contains much medical information. The Poet having tried the hot bath at Baiæ, to no purpoſe, was now uſing the cold bath, for the recovery of his health, (by the advice of Antonius Muſa) amid froſt and ſnow: from whence we may perceive, that the preſent ſalutary practice of winter bathing is as old as the Auguſtine age. Antonius Muſa, phyſician extraordinary to the Emperor, was at this time, (viz. when the epiſtle was written) in high vogue at the court of Rome, having juſt before performed a cure upon Auguſtus himſelf, by the judicious uſe of the cold bath. But how tranſient the glory, and ſhort-lived the patronage beſtowed on the beſt practitioners of the healing art! for cold bathing being the faſhion, and like all other new-diſcovered remedies, expected to cure every complaint; it was preſcribed for all diſorders, but the ſame preſcription that had in ſo extraordinary a manner, relieved Auguſtus, having unluckily killed Marcellus; the ſcience of phyſic, and all its profeſſors, fell into their original contempt. This I attribute to the Romans being unacquainted with the operation of medicine;

for

for I am ſorry to ſay, that (though your favourites) they were little better than an ignorant people, even in the moſt improved ſtate : the art of war being the only one that they underſtood.

“*Tu regere imperio populos, Romane memento*” was the beſt characteriſtic encomium that the wit, taſte, and genius of Virgil could beſtow on his countrymen. Again :

“*Tollere nodofam neſcit medicina podagram,*” is another Horatian aphoriſm ; and can any thing be better expreſſed, or in the general, be more true in obſervation ; For if it be not true that, in the preſent improved ſtate of medicine the gout is abſolutely incurable, yet I believe you will allow that this is a ſingularly critical malady, which no judicious phyſician would ever attempt to cure ; and thoſe daring empirics, who make the attempt, if ever they do remove the gouty paroxiſms, generally at the ſame time remove their patients out of this troubleſome world.

Once more, read the following ſtanza—

Crefcit

*Crescit indulgens sibi dirus hydrophs ;
Nec sitim pellit, nisi causa morbi
Fugerit venis, et aquosus albo,
Corpore languor ;*

and tell me, if what the faculty call a Leucophlegmatia,* was ever more beautifully, or more scientifically described? Horace certainly improved himself much from the conversation of his medical friend Musa, as I hope to do by your correspondence.

Yours, &c.

P. S. Since the above letter was written I have had an unexpected opportunity of referring to the works of Aristotle. In proof of what I have already asserted, speaking of the heart, in his chapter concerning animals, he has these express words, καὶ τοῖς κοίλοις αὐτοῖς νεύρα ἐνέσσι: *in ipsis cavitatibus nervi insunt.*

“ In

* This word is derived from λευκος, white, and φλεγμα, phlegm, or humour; and this phlegm (in its common sense) is what Horace alludes to. When speaking of himself, he says, *præcipue sanus nisi quum FITUITA molestus est*: “that he is in good health, unless when a defluen of phlegm is troublesome.—Celsus, a physician of some note, who lived about the reign of Nero, makes a curious threefold division of dropsies; and calls the third sort leucophlegmatia; and which he believed to proceed from some defect of the liver and spleen.

“ In the very cavaties (of the heart) there are nerves,” as the antients called them ; tendons, according to the modern expreffion, this ſpeaks for itſelf, and needs no further comment.

I have been juſt dipping into his chapter, *περί φυτῶν*, concerning plants : and I think that here, as well as in his Poetics, he ſhews, that he was, or might have been, if he choſe it, a firſt rate poet, for he is ever full of metaphorical expreſſions : he talks of “ *φλιγες*,” the veins of trees ; and the ſap he calls *μυελλον*, the marrow : and he likewiſe mentions *Κραδίην*, the heart of a tree, by the ſame ſtrong phraſe, as we now ſay, the heart of oak. I agree with you, and believe with moſt others, in thinking our immortal Lock, a much greater, and to my conception a much clearer metaphyſician than Ariſtotle. But there is no ſuch compariſon between the general abilities of the two men ; for the genius of the former (great as it was) was confined to certain ſubjects, that of the latter was unlimited.

LETTER

LETTER XLI.

ON VARIOUS SUBJECTS.



*Ut Pictura Poësis erit, quæ si propius stes,
Te capiet magis.* HOR.

SIR,

I THINK that the motto from Horace can never be better applied than to Virgil. I dipped into the *Æneid* at first with a view only to the wound now under consideration ; but, in the language of romance, I have been so spell-bound by the charms of the Virgilian page, that I quit it with reluctance, even for the re-perusal of the Homeric. Not that Homer is not a greater poet than Virgil, or that the *Iliad* is not upon the whole a nobler and more striking poem than the *Æneid* ; but that the productions of the Mantuan Muse, some how improve more than

P

any

any other on a repeated perusal. To come to the purpose—Æneas's last wound, as described in the 12th book, is the counter-part of that of Menelaus, with only this difference; that in Menelaus's case, the barbs of the arrow were not in the flesh; but here the stem of the arrow was broken, and the barbs remained fixed in the flesh of the thigh, as it is generally understood. At this moment I have not Virgil by me, but from most circumstances, more particularly by the phrase

“*Alternos longè nitentem cuspide gressus.*”

I think the wound must be there, or thereabout; tho' I do not remember that Virgil expressly says so: be that as it may, that wound is confusedly announced, and no wise equal to the Homeric one from whence it was, in some measure, copied. In this place, however, the hero wishes to have a little heroic surgery performed; for, in his rage for the fight, he desires his attending friends to cut out the barbed dart with the points of their swords; but Iäpis, the old army surgeon, knew better, and practised according to the best of his knowledge; but vain was human aid! the poet is therefore forced to have recourse to supernatural

tural agency ; and the Mother-Goddess very opportunely comes in to the assistance of her afflicted son ; she applies the Ditany of Crete, but forgets not to add a little of the precious juice of Ambrosia, and odoriferous Panacæa ; the two last are metaphorical herbs. and not to be found in any botanical garden in Europe ; but the Ditany of Crete is well known, and generally esteemed a vulnerary herb ; it is a species of the origanum, or wild marjoram. Virgil shews himself every where an excellent botanist, if he be not so good a surgeon as Homer. Take the description of the plant in the poet's own words :

Puberibus caulem foliis, & flore comantem

Purpureo.

“ The stalk or stem, with downy or woolly leaves, and the head crowned or topped with a purple flower.” I have seen this herb, I believe, in the botanical garden at Kew. You are an eminent botanist, and I only an amateur of the art. I have not a Linnæus to refer to, but you have ; and if you do, you may possibly find that Virgil's account of the Ditany (all but the root, and that he has not mentioned)

may differ only from his in this respect, that the one is written in prose, and the other in beautiful verse.

Your's, &c.

P. S. In answer to your short query in your last favour, just this minute received, viz. why I think Demosthenes* a greater orator than Cicero; I say, that judgment is formed upon the different effect that their orations had upon their auditors; for when Demosthenes concluded, the general cry was, "Let us march against Phillip!" and Cicero's harangue being ended, the general exclamation was, "what a beautiful discourse the orator has delivered!" But this was not always the case. I have not read any of Cicero's orations for many years; but, if I remember rightly, his oration *pro Marco Marcello*, had a different and superior effect: for, as well as I can recollect, Cæsar went into the senate-house, or court of judicature, determined to condemn Marcellus, in spite

* According to Plutarch, Pericles the Athenian, who lived before Demosthenes, was a greater man than he:—His works are lost; and, according to the same author, Demeas, a mariner, was a better extemporary orator than either of them.

spite of the fine things that the orator might advance in his favour; but the result of the business did equal honour to the abilities of the one, and the feelings of the other. For the orator's address to the Conqueror of the World is, in my humble opinion, as great a master-piece of oratory as the world has ever produced. But between the general abilities of the two men, comparison is at an end. Demosthenes was only an orator and politician; whereas Cicero was a man of almost universal talents; and though he has been ridiculed by Juvenal as a bad poet; his defence of Archias the poet, shews, that at least he understood the noble principles of the art, as well as any man of the age in which he lived.

LETTER

L E T T E R XLII.

ON VARIOUS SUBJECTS.

*Pacifer huic dederat florem Cylenius album,
Moly vocant superi, nigrâ radice tenetur.* OVID.

SIR,

IT has been a moot point with the learned, that no internal medicines were given at the time of the Trojan war. I am not quite certain, however, that the instance I am now giving, does not in some measure contradict the assertion: read the sequel, and judge for yourself. I have been full in my remarks on the botanical knowledge of Virgil: and perhaps this is one of the few sciences, in which he was superior to his great master. However, Homer, tho' he treats but little concerning the properties of herbs, whenever he does, his description is accurate. Turn to the 10th Book of the Odyssæy, where Ulysses, going to the palace of Circe, to seek after his lost friends,

met

met the God Mercury, in disguise, who gave him an antidote against the medical cups of the celebrated enchantress.

πότε φαρμακον,

ῥίζη μὲν μελαν ἔσκε, γαλακτὶ δὲ εἶκελον ἄνθος.

Μῶλυ δὲ μιν καλέουσι θεοί.

“ He (viz. Mercury) gave an herb, the root was black, but the flower was like milk: the Gods call it Moly. This herb is a species of the Allium, or Garlic. I have seen this herb likewise, I believe, in the botanical garden at Kew; the flower was literally white as milk, the root I never saw; but was informed that it was black, and still retains the classical name of the Homeric Moly. It is mentioned by several Greek authors, and I believe by Galen: it is little used in modern prescription. I have seen some account of it in some old medical dispensary, composed about the time of the witching days of bigot James, where it is advised as a specific against witchcraft. Pray do you know any think of the efficacy of the herb? Is it a carminative, or anywise calculated to relieve those nervous or hypocondraical diseases,

diseases, which were supposed to proceed from the effect of magic? You would laugh at the long notes of some learned commentators on this passage: but let us advert a little to the original text. Here we are told, that the Goddess Circe gave her *φαρμακα* or drugs in the bread that her guests eat, and in the wine which they drank; and that this, together with the operation of her wand, transformed them into brutes. Let us abstract the veil of poetry, and consider the matter in the stile of common sense—Circe was a beautiful woman, and a noted demi-rep of antiquity, resided on a pleasant island, and captivated by her personal charms; and if she gave any drug, I should suspect, that like the fair Helen, she exhibited some nepenthe or opiate in her wine, which made the drinkers, in some measure, forget themselves and their former state; and this, together with pleasure and sensuality, might authorize the metaphorical expression of their being transformed into brutes. As an humorous proof of the virtue of the herb alluded to, I remember an anecdote, of what is called in this part of the world, a white witch, that is, an anti-witch, or a good wizard, who counteracts the power
of

of the bad or malevolent ones. This man, a novel genius in his capacity of an exorcist, used to mix up a dose of garlic and some other foetid herbs, with this design ; that he concluded, that the Devil himself could not stand the stink of the herbs, that he had prepared for his repast ; and therefore that he would be obliged to quit his patient *nolens volens*. I cannot say, but that I wish that the said King James and the Majority of his Lords and Commons, had taken a plentiful dose of the magical antidote ; which, in all probability, would have made them so sick and sorry, that they would not have had time to pass an act whereby half the old women in the kingdom were liable to undergo a violent death, under the absurd idea of exerting an inconceivable influence.

LETTER

L E T T E R XLIII.

SINGULAR INSTANCES

O F

AMPUTATED HANDS.

SIR,

AMONG the singular death-wounds in the Iliad, I now refer you to the 5th Book, where Euryalus wounds Hypsenor, the priest of Scamander, with a stroke of the sword—*ἀπὸ δ' ἔρξε κῆρα βαρύναν* “and cut off his heavy hand,” *αἱματόεσσα δὲ κεῖς πεδίῳ πεσε*, “but the bloody hand fell on the plain,” and death ensued. This is almost the only passage of the sort, that Pope has honoured with a medical remark, tho’ he has been copious in his general observations on the great variety of deaths and wounds, &c. He tells us here, that Homer makes this man die upon the cutting off his arm, which is an instance of his skill, for the great flux of blood that must follow such
a wound

a wound, would be the immediate cause of death ;* for my own part, I do not clearly understand how much, or what part of the arm (if any) might be cut off with the hand. Homer has not announced this matter with his wonted accuracy ; for he only says, in general terms, that the foe, rushing with the sword, “ ἐλασ’ ὤμων,” smote the shoulder, and cut off the hand, as before mentioned ; from which vague terms it is not quite clear, but that the whole arm might be taken off together with the hand. Pope has made the matter clear in his version, though I do not know that he is warranted by the original.

“ On his broad shoulder fell the forceful brand,

“ Then, *glancing downward*, lopp’d his holy hand.”

This wound (though with some considerable variety) has been imitated by Virgil, as I have already remarked. But Lucan, in his *Pharfalia*, has carried this matter to an extravagant height. In your extensive library you may easily turn from one volume to another ; you will perceive my meaning clearly

* The death might have been prevented by tying up the arteries, or applying a powerful styptic.

clearly, if you dip into the third Book, and peruse the description of the sea-fight between the Massilians and D. Brutus; where, while a daring sailor was fixing his hand on a ship of the enemy;

—— *eam gravis insuper ictus*

Amputat, ——

“ a mighty blow from above amputated it,” but the hand *immortua nervis*—(a bold expression!) continued its hold: and his right hand being off, “ *instaurat prælia lævâ,*” “ he renews the fight with his left;” and that likewise being cut off, “ *cum toto lacerto,*” together with the whole arm, after receiving many stabs, and being run through and through; *crebrâ confixus cuspide.*

—— *Hostilem*——

Infiluit, solo nociturus pondere, puppim.

“ He, a mangled trunk, took a desperate leap into the hostile ship, and helped to sink it by his dying weight.” Here’s a brave sailor for you! what boasted British tar can come near him? Lucan talks of “ *Miracula fati,* the miracles of fate,” that distinguished the battles which he recorded; and pray is not this one of them!

them? This extravagantly-hyperbolical account transcends all comment of my feeble pen. Pray is not this Roman, somewhat like, or rather far exceeding Witherington in the Scotch ballad of Chevy Chace?

When both his legs were smitten off,
He fought upon his stumps.

I have a confused notion of something a little similar on authentic record, at one of the Grecian sea-fights; when a sailer, for some small time after his hands were amputated, still held the enemy's ship by his teeth. I recollect another somewhat similar instance, but it is so long ago, that I almost forget the particulars; but when I was very young, I remember to have seen a sailer without any hand. There was, at that time, a well authenticated account given of the occasion; by which it appeared, that by some means or other, he had been thrown overboard from a long-boat. I believe the boat was in distress, and the crew nearly starving for want of provisions; and that they drew lots who should be first cast over: but the man on whom the lot fell, swam after the

Q

boat,

boat, and continued to catch hold of the rudder, or some other part of it; in consequence of which attempt to save himself from drowning, both his hands were by the crew chopped off, one after the other: nevertheless he continued to swim after them, or, as his comrades phrased it, to walk in the water—infomuch, that after some time, the remaining failors in the boat, moved by compassion, took him in again; but the most extra part of this business was, that though there was not a surgeon, or even a surgeon's mate on board; the flux of blood was stopped, and the wounds in a fair way of healing before the boat could reach any port—comment on all these accounts, and this in particular, as you like it.

Your's, &c.

N. B. There is likewise another passage in the 13th Iliad; where Pope not only translates justly and beautifully, but likewise comments boldly: speaking of a spear being infixed in the heart of a dying hero, he adds,

“The labouring heart heaves with so strong a bound,

“The long lance shakes, and vibrates in the wound.”

Pope, who I believe knew very little of anatomy, phyfiology, or furgery, has compofed his comment from extracts of different authors, who have written (a little extravagantly) on the amazing powers of the heart.

LETTER XLIV.

REMARKS ON LUCAN.

*Cedet rudis mufa ferocis Enni,
Et docti furor arduus Lucreti.*

The ruder mufe of Ennius, rough old fage !
Shall yield, and learn'd Lucretius' lofty rage.

SIR,

THE firft line of the motto is ftrictly true, but the fecond contains rather an extravagant compliment. Lucan, as a Poet, is certainly inferior to Lucretius ; but his *Pharfalia*, confidered (as it always ought to be) as an hiftorical poem, poffeffes great merit : his page has to me all the charms of

novelty, for it never met my eyes till now. The several characters of Cæsar, Pompey, and Cato, are most judiciously and beautifully discriminated; tho' from the author's political principles, he is no great friend to the first and most illustrious of the three. In the first book now before me, Lucan very poetically describes the rapidity of Cæsar's marches, by asserting, that he was more rapid than a stone from the Balearian sling, or an arrow from the Parthian bow: he likewise in the same book, accurately distinguishes the two different employments of the two sacred officers, the Bardi and the Druidæ. The office of the former was to celebrate the exploits of warriors slain in battle; but take his address to them in his own words, than which, I think, no Latin verse but that of Virgil can be more beautiful. Read and accept my flying version.

*Vos quoque qui fortes animas, belloque peremptas
Laudibus in longum vates dimittitis ævum
Plurima securi fudiſtis carmina bardi.*

'Tis yours, ye bards! to sing in lofty strain
The souls of mighty chiefs in battle slain;

And

And like yourselves, 'midst war's alarms secure,
Your num'rous lays long ages shall endure.

The business of the latter, (viz. the Druids) was to superintend the sacred offices of religion; and he expressly says, that they taught, even in that rude age, the sublime but mysterious doctrines of the transmigration and immortality of the soul. Lucan has, I think, been poetically diffuse in relating the prodigies that preceded the civil wars: but I more particularly desire to call your attention to that part, where Aruns, the Tuscan augur, examines the entrails of a steer, or bull newly slain; and I think you will perceive the superstition of the Roman People, and their ignorance of natural causes; for all the bad ominous appearances were owing to a dissolved state of the blood, as it is evident that the beast sacrificed, must have been ill of the murrain (as described by Virgil) or of some other malignant and putrid disease. How little has common sense, or indeed any sense, to do with superstition!

Your's, &c.

P. S. As a plain proof of the dissolved state of the blood in the steer sacrificed, advert to the following verses:

*Nec cruor emicuit solitus ; sed vulnere largo
Diffusum rutilo nigrum pro sanguine virus.*

And again,

Plurimus asperso variabat sanguine livor.

But I cannot say that I thoroughly understand the Augur's phrase, "*cor jacet.*" Does he mean that the heart lay low in situation ; or does he mean that the heart lay still and did not palpitate, as was usual in animals that were opened alive, like those in the Roman sacrifices ?

LETTER

LETTER XLV.

REMARKS ON LUCAN.

SIR,

TURN once more to the third Book of the Pharsalia, and in the sea-fight already alluded to, you will be entertained with a double death-wound of a very curious nature : the description is most singular, and not copied, or even imitated, from either Homer or Virgil. Since my last letter I have met with Rowe's translation, I shall therefore give you the original, together with that, which is in this place very just to the sense of the author. But, to perceive the full force and propriety of the two-fold wound, you will recollect, that Tagus, the sea-officer, who is wounded, was engaged with two ships of the enemy.

— — — *Dum pugnat ab altâ*
Puppe Tagus, Graiumque audax asplustre retentat,
Terga

*Terga simul pariter missis et pectora telis
 Transigitur, medio concurrit pectore ferrum
 Et stetit incertus, flueret quo vulnere sanguis ;
 Donec utrasque simul largus cruor expulit hastas.*

When from the lofty poop, whence fierce he fought,
 Tagus to seize a Grecian vessel fought ;
 But double death his daring hand repress'd,
 One spear transfix'd his back, and one his breast,
 And deadly met within his heaving chest. }
 Doubtful awhile the flood was seen to stay,
 At length the steely shafts at once gave way ;
 Then fleeting life a two-fold passage found,
 And ran divided from each streaming wound.

Take another picturesque description from the
 same naval engagement.

*Dum cupit in sociam Gyareus erumpere puppim
 Excipit immissum sustensa per ilia ferrum,
 Affixusque rati, telo retinente, pendit.*

To fill his place bold Gyareus essay'd,
 But passing from a neighb'ring ship was stay'd :
 Swift thro' his loins a flying jav'lin struck,
 And nail'd him to the vessel he forsook.

ROWE.

Take

Take descriptions as they are; instead of giving my comments, yours are expected, by

Your's, &c.

P. S. I since find, on better information, that Lucan's hyperbolically-poetical account of the sailor's extra exploits after the loss of his hands, had the following foundation; one Acilius, a mariner, but formerly a foot soldier of the 10th legion, having lost his right-hand in the sea-fight, grappled the enemy's frigate, or some small vessel with his left hand; and did not quit his hold till the vessel sunk. This fact is supported upon the united authorities of Valerius Maximus, and Plutarch.

LETTER

LETTER XLVI.

LUCAN'S ACCOUNT

OF

SERPENTS.

SIR,

OF all the pages of the *Pharsalia*, I would most particularly recommend the latter part of the 9th Book to your perusal ; for there you will find copious materials in your own way. Lucan's origin of Serpents in Africa, is most poetically and romantically attributed to the blood that distilled from the amputated head of the Gorgon Medusa ;

— — — *virus stillantis tabe Medusæ.*

You will likewise be much delighted with the natural history of venomous serpents, exemplified in a great variety of instances ; most of them I believe are found to exist except the *Amphisbæna*, which I take

to

to be a creature of the imagination ; for if ever there was a serpent with two heads, it must have been a monstrous and not a natural production. But I desire chiefly to refer you to the fatal cases of the several foldiers. The standard-bearer, Aulus, (a young man of noble family) was the first that suffered by the bite of a *Dipsas*: the unquenchable and fatal thirst that ensued, was attended with no violent or any other alarming symptom :

“ *Vix dolor, aut sensus dentis fuit.*”

Was this uncommon thirst the specific action of the virus, or the mere result of feverish heat ?—Unlucky Sabellus next felt the tooth of the *Seps* on his ankle ; attended with symptoms most unaccountably malignant : the venom of this diminutive reptile is described as possessing a power not only of dissolving the blood, but even the flesh and the bones * Among other particulars, it is expressly said, to perform this operation on the “ *vincula nervorum* :” does he mean nerves in the true sense, or only tendons ? Is there

* Virgil mentions the same circumstances in his Plague of the Cattle.

————— ————— omniaque in se
Alia minutatim morbo collapsa trahebat.—GEOR. 3.

there any animal poison in nature really possessed of such destructive power? Or rather is not the account incredibly exaggerated by the Author's fancy? Nafidius experienced different, but equally horrible, effects from the poison of the burning Prestor; for he was almost instantly inflamed and swoln all over his body.

— — — *late tollente veneno.*

'This man's body is recorded to have been so peculiarly putrid, that the birds of prey would not touch it; and his comrades were afraid to come near enough to the corpse to give it burial, but

— — — *crescens fugere cadaver.*

fled from the carcase, which continued to swell or grow in size even after death.

Impressit dentes Hæmorrhöis aspera Tullo
Magnanimo juveni, admiratorique Catonis.

Next the rough Hæmorrhöis impressed her teeth on Tullus, a magnanimous youth, an admirer of Cato and of his virtues: and Cato's favourite bled from every pore:—the poison of this huge serpent (characterized

terized in a former part of the poem by the title of "Ingens") evidently acted by dissolving the crasis of the blood : and therefore the effects may be accounted for ; since something similar, (though in a less degree) generally occurs in most putrid and malignant fevers. There is one remarkable expression in the original,

" *Sudor rubet.* The sweat was red."

which, I think, in some measure, accounts for the operation of that fatal disease, called by way of eminence, " the sweat ;" and which some hundred years ago was so peculiarly destructive to the Constitutions of Englishmen ; and, in my humble opinion, the case was simply thus—the blood, in a dissolved state, transfused through the usual outlets of perspiration.

There is no end to these venomous animals ; for in the words of the Poet, the next misfortune fell upon " thee, O Lævus !" But thy death was comparatively happy ; for the poison of the cold asp seemed to be of a deleterious nature, and to suspend the nervous influence without pain or inflammation : " *nulloque dolore.*" And this circumstance justifies

R

the

the conduct of queen Cleopatra, in choosing to die of the bite of the little sleepy serpent of her own Nile. But to proceed in the horrid catalogue; a cruel serpent, called by the Romans *Jaculum*, from its resemblance to a javelin, darted at a distance, from an old trunk of a tree, and fixed on the temples of Paulus. Lucan adds,

Nil ibi virus agit; raptuit cum vulnere fatum.

Not poison but a wound the warrior flew. ROWE.

I can nowise understand either by the original or the translation, in what manner this wound was mortal: if it had not been specified as a wound, I should suppose the soldier was killed from the blow, as the animal darted so swiftly and violently. Pray, do you not think it possible, that the darting animal might somehow divide the temporal artery, and so cause death by the consequent effusion of blood?—More miracles! In the name of wonder what have we here in the next case of Murrus? Take the Poet's own words—This warrior having stabbed a basilisk with the point of his spear:

— — — *velox currit per tela venenum,*
Invaditque manum — — —

“ The

"The active poison runs along the spear, and invades the hand." • I have heard the same effect attributed to the bite of the rattle-snake: both facts transcend my belief: but this Murrus (whom I suspect to be a surgeon as well as a soldier) stopped all further mischief, we are told, by chopping off his hand at once: but I think such an operation, unless performed in the very instant, would have been ineffectual. For if the venom ran so rapidly along the spear, it must have extended beyond the hand, before that could possibly be amputated. What think you of these matters?

Yours, &c.

P. S. I had forgot to mention the fell scorpion*; the Solpuga, a species of venomous emmet or ant; and the Cerastes, an horned serpent; and besides all these there are even yet other serpents, viz. the Cherfyder, † an amphibious animal, that lives both

R 2

on

* The Scorpion is, properly speaking, an insect of large size.

† Cherfyder is beautifully described by Virgil, in his 3d Georg:
"Est etiam ille malus Calibris in saltibus anguis," &c.

on land and in water; the Chelyder;† the Speckled Cenchris; the Ammodytes, that lies concealed in the sand the Søythale, that casts her slough in the winter? the Natrix, or the Swimmer;* and the Pareas, that makes furrows in the sand. I need not tell you, that most of these names of serpents are expressive of their qualities. And most of these serpents are described by Aristotle, in his history of animals.

† Chelyder:—" *Galbaneoque agitare graves nidore Chelydros,*" Geor. 3. Pliny asserts, that the smell of Galbanum will drive away serpents.

* A kind of water serpent.

LETTER

LETTER XLVIII.

FURTHER REMARKS

ON

LUCAN.

SIR,

AS you never yet read Lucan, I think I can promise you much pleasure, by the further perusal of the afore-mentioned 9th Book; for there I shall beg leave to introduce you to the Pfylians, the most extraordinary people, according to our author's account, that ever this world produced, and very properly situated amidst all the viperous brood.—Would you suspect another miracle so soon?—Here you have it—read and judge:

— — — *Gens unica terras,*
Incolit, a sævo Serpentum innoxia morsu,
Marmaridæ Pfylli — — —

“The Pfylli; the only nation on the face of the
 earth,

earth, who could not be hurt by the bites of serpents."

He likewise mentions a most singular custom prevailing among this poison-proof nation.* When any good men suspect their wives of being connected with men of another tribe or people,

Letificâ dubios explorant aspidæ partus.

they make the following experiment: if the newborn babes can bear the bite of the asp unhurt, they declare them genuine Pŷyllians, otherwise not. This tells well in fiction, but can never be reconciled to the belief of the natural historian. Some of this tribe that followed the Roman camp, exorcised it by spells and charms, and likewise made large fires round it; and burnt a great variety of herbs, supposed to be of a smell or quality calculated to keep serpents at a due distance. The poet recounts a large catalogue of herbs of this description, and such as will afford ample materials for the exercise of your botanical knowledge. He likewise does not
fail

* This whole account may, in some measure, owe its origin to the invention of some antidote, which it is well known that the American Indians have against the poison of the rattle-snake.

fail to avail himself of the powers of the potent Panacæa ;* a poetical herb of all virtues, but existing no where in the nature of things, and the pure coinage of poets' brains. He likewise particularizes the well-known herb Centaury, (*vulgo centory*) and by the phrase "Thessala Centaurea," gives reason to think, that the name was derived from that famous antient practitioner of medicine, the Centaur Chiron. But the usual practice of this tribe, in preventing the ill consequences of venomous bites, inflicted on strangers, was, we are told, to make use of charms : (but God knows how) and fearing these should not succeed ; they made a circle round the wound with their own saliva, or spittle ; to confine the poison as in a magic circumference ; and then they sucked it out with their lips : and this last practice I believe, contained the whole secret of the business. This seems to have been a rational practice, and likewise
seems

* This word, in its true and genuine sense, signifies a medicine that cures all diseases ; and any foreigner would suppose, that our English empirics, or quack doctors, by their confidence in advertising to cure all disorders, were in possession of this medicine. But as their boasted nostrums, upon a moderate computation, kill five where they cure one ; the odds (in the gambler's phrase) seem to be in their disfavour.

a safe one ; for as Cato observes in the beginning of his march, when his soldiers came to a well, surrounded by and full of serpents,

*Noxia serpentum est admissio sanguine pestis,
Morfu virus habent, & fatam dente minantur,
Pocula morte carent.* — — —

* * * * *
My soldiers drink, and dread nor death nor pain,
When urg'd to rage, their teeth the serpents fix,
And venom with our vital juices mix ;
The pest infus'd, thro' ev'ry vein runs round,
Infects the mass, and death is in the wound ;
Harmless and safe, no poison here they shed.—Rowe.
* * * * *

And this fact is further proved by the conduct of some German empiric that I have heard of: who boasted that he had an infallible antidote for the bite of a viper: and in order to prove it, he used to get a number of people around him, and in their presence enrage a viper, and cause it to bite a piece of flesh, which he immediately swallowed, and then took the antidote, which he well knew there was no occasion for, nor virtue in. But the patients of the German doctor did not succeed so well ; for all those
who

who were bitten by vipers, and relied on his nostrums, found no good effect, which led to the discovery after the following manner: one of the doctor's patients, rather of more discernment than the rest, being told, that the postrum he delivered was an infallible cure for the bite received, humbly requested the doctor to make the experiment upon himself, by being bitten a little by a viper. The doctor shuddered at the thought: made some plausible excuse, viz. that his blood was not at that time in a proper state for the experiment; but that at some future period he would have no objection to make the trial on himself. In the mean time the Doctor decamped, and was no more heard of, in that part of the world. This ignorant and daring empiric however, added to the improvement of real science, by proving that the poison of the viper might be swallowed, without any detriment to the constitution.

Yours, &c.

LETTER

LETTER XLIX.
 FURTHER REMARKS
 ON
 L U C A N.

SIR,

A WORD more of the Pfylli!—I cannot find precisely in what part of the vast continent of Africa this nation was situated. Rowe, in one of his notes, informs us, that the Pfyllians were near neighbours to the Nasamones, * a barbarous people that lived near the Syrtis Major. According to Rowe, the Syrtes are two gulfs upon the Coast of Africa, in the Mediterranean Sea. The first, which is that here mentioned, called Syrtis Major, (now Golfo di Solochio) lies between Cyrenaica, (now the kingdom of Barca) and the river Cinyps, or Ciruphus. The other, called Syrtis Minor, (now Golfo de Capes) on the

* Who supported themselves by plundering vessels wrecked on their inhospitable shore.

the Coast of Barbary, between Tunis and Tripoli: they are both very dangerous, as being full of shoals, banks of sand, and rocks.

Neither do I clearly understand, over what parts Cato marched his army, in order to reach, what Horace calls Jubæ Tellus, * the Land of Juba; but in their way the army was obliged to pass by both the abovementioned Syrtes, which Lucan very poetically describes. According to Lucan's account, Cato must be supposed to have penetrated into the very heart of Africa: whereas, according to all human probability, his march could never, at any time, be far from the Mediterranean.

The march of the Catonic host, seems to have been much in and about Byzaceum. † which I apprehend to be the antient name of the modern Tunis. In some parts or other of the aforementioned countries, the antient Pfylli must have had their residence. This people was said to live in the midst of a country of serpents: which is rather marvellous—because veno-
mous

* Mauritania, inhabited at present by the Moors, and situated in the western part of Africa.

† The capital of Byzacea, a Roman province.

mous animals and wild beasts of all kinds, generally live in parts unfrequented and untrodden by the foot of man.

Most exaggerations and hyperboles of the poets have for their basis some foundation or other in the nature of things. From whence then did the notion originate, that the Pfyllians were not obnoxious to the venom of serpents? Was it because this race of mortals was so very familiar with the viperous brood, that they were never enough irritated by their near approach to bite them at all? Or that the bite did no injury? I begin to think that the fact, received under some certain restrictions, was true. I fancy you will agree with me, that almost all poisons lose by degrees their power of action, by being habituated to the constitution. This is strictly true of the variolous, the morbillous, and pestilential Virus: it may, in some measure, be affirmed of all mineral and vegetable, and why not of the viperous poisons?

I have read little or nothing of the natural history of serpents or vipers; there is, I hear, a treatise professedly written on that subject, by Owen; but I
cannot

cannot procure the book in this part of the world; yet, from a few circumstances that have fallen under my own observation, I have the strongest reason to suppose, that the viperine poison, by being often applied to the blood of the same animal, does, in course of time, lose its malignancy. And I think it must have been by this habit, (if at all,) that the Pfylli were not so much afflicted by the bites of serpents as other nations. For I believe there is not a man in any part of the globe, who would not at first (before the power of habit had taken place) be more or less injured by the bite of an enraged serpent; tho' different constitutions may be more or less affected by the same stimuli; and some constitutions are more susceptible of one stimulus than of another. Every day's practice must prove this fact to you: what I mean to say from my own knowledge, is applicable only to our English vipers.—More of this hereafter.

Yours, &c.

S

LETTER

LETTER L.
REMARKS
ON THE
BITES OF VIPERS.

— —
Vipera.

Aut mala tactu

Virg. Geo. 3.

SIR,

AS you are so desirous of every information in your professional line ; I will, without order or connection, give you two facts, in support of my former opinion : and whether the cases do or do not confirm my conjecture, is left to your decision. Many years ago I had a spaniel dog, (I did not breed him myself, nor do I know whether he was ever instructed to the purpose) that would hunt vipers, as hounds hunt hares, and would take great apparent pleasure in killing them. The circumstance gave me some little opportunity of perceiving the sagacity of the spaniel; his usual mode being to come upon the
viper

viper unperceived, spring on it on a sudden, seize it just behind the head, shake and bite it to death; and under these circumstances, in general with impunity. If the viper perceived the dog's approach, and could not conveniently make towards its hole, but coiled, and stood in its own defence; this cunning, domestic animal instinctively feared the consequences of an open attack, and continued to bark and bay, till he compelled the dangerous foe to retire: when he immediately sprung after it, and generally caught his prey. But under these unguarded assaults, he seldom succeeded without disagreeable consequences. The same dog, after he was in my possession, was bitten either in his mouth or throat (the wound was too small to be ascertained) and after the space of twenty-four hours, no preventive or antidote having been used, his throat swelled very much externally; and from some symptoms, I doubted whether the inflammation, if not timely removed, might not terminate in the canine hydrophobia: and I learned thus much, however, that the venom of the viper, when it affected the same parts, produced nearly the same effects. For the poor afflicted animal could

with great difficulty swallow either solids or fluids; he was then drenched with sweet oil, and the same was rubbed into his mouth and throat. He recovered, but did not possess his former health for nearly a week. The dog, awed by no consequences, continued his dangerous practice for three or four summers. He was frequently bitten in different parts of the body, and inflammation and swelling always attended in a greater or less degree; but at last the dog did not seem much to regard the matter: if he was bitten, the part continued to swell a little, but the swelling generally went off in a short time, and always without any remedy given inwardly or applied outwardly.

I have lately had a similar account from an old fellow, who followed mole-catching professionally, and viper-catching occasionally. He had a little dog (of the mongrel breed, between a spaniel and a cur) that had been trained to hunt both moles and vipers. This cur, according to the man's account, must have been a hardy dog; for I could not find that his master ever administered any remedy, as often as the dog had been bitten in his service. He said, that the
first

first summer in which he taught the dog this business, he was (and no wonder) continually sick, and almost dead. But, to use the master's own words—after the animal had been accustomed to it, he was very little affected.

This mole-catcher, a man of most consummate ignorance, (which is no uncommon case) pretended to more knowledge than other people; and, after much entreaty, he discovered to me a most profound secret, (and as he boasted, and I believe truly) known to no one else. And what do you think this grand secret was? Neither more or less than this: that the poison of a viper (adder he called it) was of that peculiar quality, that it would run upwards and no other way; so that if a person was bitten in the foot, you had nothing more to do, than to turn him topsyturvy, and set him on his head for a convenient space of time, and that then all the poison would run out at the point of the great toe, and trouble the constitution no longer. Here is country practise for you! If you have a mind to astonish the world by a *nonvelle methode*, you have my permission to adopt the discovery: tho' by the bye I much doubt whether some

of the established theories of the present day, have any better foundation than this singular conceit of an unlettered rustic.

Yours, &c.

LETTER LI.
REMARKS
ON THE
BITES OF VIPERS.

SIR,

YOU are pleased to be rather facetious at the expence of my west-country viper-catcher, as you are pleased to call him: tho' give me leave to tell you, that had he been educated in London, and early initiated in the arts of the metropolis, he might have started up an enterprising genius, the prince of quacks; most probably at this time rolling in his chariot, and filling the news-papers with numerous cures (of all diseases curable and incurable) attested
by

by a set of well-sounding plausible names. But as you so particularly desire me to communicate any instances, coming under my own knowledge, respecting the effects of bites by vipers; I will, without further ceremony, give two instances, somewhat different; and to me singular, as they are the only two that ever came under my observation; tho' perhaps both may be familiar to you in your extensive practice. Some years ago, a stout healthy woman, (and the mother of several children) about thirty years of age, while gathering of strawberries was bitten in the finger by a young viper, that lay concealed under the leaves. For, to use her own words, "it was not much bigger than a rush;" but after a short time her hand began to swell and change colour; and after about seven or eight hours, the arm up to the elbow, was much discoloured, and speckled like the skin of a viper; and during much of this time she trembled like one in an ague-fit. After about the space of ten hours, a neighbouring apothecary was called in; what remedies he applied I was never informed; but in a day or two the woman recovered, and is, I believe, alive at this time.—It seems to

me

me wonderful that an animal so young, and so little irritated, should bite so venomously: and again, was the tremour the effect of the virus acting on the nervous system, or was it the mere effect of fear and apprehension?

Take another instance that happened nearly about the same time. An ignorant clown, driving his cart to market, according to his own account, saw something in the hedge basking itself in the sun, that, to his eye, looked very pretty. Hodge stopp'd to look, and went so very near, that the pretty thing darted at him, and bit him by the thumb: the thumb bled a little; and I apprehend that the clown, (according to his usual custom,) suck'd out the blood with his lips, and proceeded on to the place of his destination, neither sick nor sorry, but like Dryden's Cimon, "whistled as he went for want of thought." When he came to the market-town, about three hours after the accident, some people looked at his hand, by that time discoloured; and asked him the cause? "Ha! ha! ha! (says Hodge) I'll tell you anon;" and repeated, that a pretty thing had caught him by the hand: being interrogated what kind of a thing it was,

was, he said it had a fiery forked tongue, but made a noise like a goose, tho' it had no feathers. He was persuaded to apply (somewhat reluctantly) to an Apothecary of the town, who gave him medicines, and made some topical application; I never could learn of what nature. Hodge returned from market as he went out, neither sick nor sorry, and half-drunk as usual; but the hand remained discoloured for some days.

On the consideration of this case, was the poison (as I suspect it to be) extracted by sucking the part affected? And if this was the fact, how came the hand to be discoloured, and this discolouration to continue so long? Make the most of these facts, they are authentic.—I had forgot to mention, that according to the fool's account, the viper was very large; since he said, it was as long as his arm, and almost as big: and as the summer was far advanced, and the weather remarkably hot, I should have supposed that the bite must have been venomous in an extreme degree.

Yours, &c.

P. S. Your concise letter has reached my hands just in the minute that the above was concluded. I

am

am sorry to find that you cannot relish the beauties of Lucan, as much as I could wish you to do. You seem to challenge me to produce one instance in which he is equal to Virgil. I am bold to say, that in one respect he is superior to Virgil, equal to Milton, and only inferior to Homer and Shakspeare. I mean in the discrimination of characters. I beg only that you would peruse the *Pharsalia* throughout; and tell me if the several characters of Julius Cæsar, Pompey, and of his amiable wife Cornelia, but above all of Cato, are not exhibited with a propriety superior to any prose-historian. The patriot Cato may be considered as an heroical philosopher, or philosophical hero, a kind of novel personage in an epic-poem, and as such most inimitably sustained. Read Addison's tragedy of Cato, and you will plainly perceive how much he was beholden to the historical poet, for the strong outlines of the principal person of his drama. Lucan was a red-hot republican, and it is no easy matter for any author to divest himself of party-spirit; and this is evident in the portrait of Julius Cæsar: the poet has given a likeness, but far from a flattering one. Julius, of all the Cæsars, was
ever

ever my favourite; he possessed more mental and personal accomplishments than perhaps fell to the lot of any one man, that ever adorned the globe of the earth. He was, in the full import of the Latin phrase, "*ad omnia natus*;" what Lord Chesterfield calls, "*L'homme universel*;" in plain English, an all-accomplished man! The Grecian Alcibiades, for versatility of genius, was something similar, but not so transcendently eminent. The pupil of Socrates, and the accomplished general of Attica, was more beautiful in his person, and could boast as many personal accomplishments; but was much inferior in mental endowments. If you wish to have my sentiments at large of this illustrious Roman; I refer you to that manuscript treatise I left with you some little time ago, and with which you expressed yourself so much pleased. It is a rhapsodical kind of composition, written when I was at the University, and intended for a public exercise. I never gave it a name, but I remember you were pleased to call it, a panegyrical oration on the first-rate geniuses and worthies of Greece, Italy, and England.*

* This little treatise has never been published.

LETTER LII.
REMARKS
ON THE
BITES OF VIPERS.

SIR,

I HUMBLY conceived that I had given you enough of vipers; but by your continued desire I resume the subject. Accept therefore another case, a little singular from the mode of treatment. A very strong, middle-aged little fellow, somewhat of a prize-fighter, and every way an hardy dog, was bitten by a viper, and admitted into - - - - - Hospital. A physician, (who had often given his opinion that the bite of a viper was not fatal to a good constitution) thought he had now a proper opportunity of making an experiment. It was late in the evening when the man was admitted: the Doctor ordered him to be put to bed, and really gave him the celebrated remedy of Dr. Laft, chalk and water; but to make his patient's mind easy, told him, with an air of great gravity and self-consequence, that there

was

was no danger in his case, for that the medicine given was a never-failing remedy. The hardy fellow, after taking the supposed specific draught, was very orderly put to bed, and a person watched by him all the night. During the whole night the man was very restless, and had some alarming symptoms; but in the morning when the physician visited, his patient was better; in so much, that the repetition of the former cretaceous julep was continued *secundem artem*, and in a few days the patient was dismissed as cured. This case speaks for itself: Nature, when uninterrupted, does wonders in her own behalf; and I believe that a good constitution, either in man or any strong beast, will somehow overcome the viporous poison: and I am taught to believe, that the bite of a viper is fatal to a dog only, when the bite is in or very near the throat.

I had forgot to mention in a former letter, that when the Pfyllians suck'd the poison out of the wound, they spit the venom out of their mouths, on the ground. They were not such proficientes as the high German doctor; but they surpassed him in one species of discernment, for they affected to be so knowing

as to be able to distinguish the poison of each serpent, by the taste!—Wonderful sagacity!

Yours, laconically.

LETTER LXXIX.
ON VARIOUS SUBJECTS.

SIR,

AS I have little or no leisure; this letter will be like yours, in a two-fold respect, since it will be very short, and consist chiefly of acknowledgements of your late favors. I feel myself happy, that you approve in general of my account of modern neurology: you agree with me and with most others, that the brain is apparently a gland, or a secretory organ of some sort; and that as such, it does most probably separate some fluid either from the blood, from the chyle, from the lymphatic serum, or from some or all of these together; and if so, why not
that

that individual fluid, which modern physicians call the nervous juice, or animal spirits? I think this the most plausible theory that ever was invented by the wit of man. You say, the nerves have no apparent cavity; but I humbly conceive this is no reason why the minutest nerve in the human body (tho' no cavity in it can be discerned by the eye or by a microscope) may not be yet hollow enough to transmit a substance as thin as light, or subtile as the electric fluid.

I still remark, that the nerves are far from being tense, so as to be supposed to act like vibrating chords. You highly commend my laudable attempt (as you call it) of pointing out, in some measure, the distinct and separate offices of the cerebrum and cerebellum: a wound in the former being seldom mortal, and a wound or any considerable injury in the latter being always so: this, you admit, strongly favours my opinion. At this very instant I am favoured with the receipt of another letter; you had been so long silent, that I knew not whether an epistle might not, with some little propriety, be addressed to you in some part of the Elysian fields! You acknowledge the receipt of my

chapter on the comparative anatomical knowledge of Homer and Virgil, and so far think with me that the latter has copied most of his death-wounds from the former : and tho' Virgil is your great favourite, you candidly confess, that he is manifestly inferior, in the variety of deaths, &c. to his great master.

You say likewise, that I have laboured hard, and not unsuccessfully, in endeavouring to defend Homer's death of Patroclus, against the censure of Pope and others. In further illustration of this subject, according to the original text of the Iliad, Apollo gave the Grecian hero a blow on the back part of the head, "*πλῆξεν δὲ μέλαφρον,*" and partly disarmed him. This is all beautiful and poetical allegory. Let us throw off the veil of poetry, and take the matter in plain prose, Homer had previously told us, that the sun was a little declining in his course : that is, it must have been about an hour after noon, and consequently the hottest hour in a summer's day, in a hot climate : and at that time Apollo, (that is the sun) smote* with his rays (that is shone intensely) on the

* In violent hot weather, the eastern nations protect their heads, to prevent what they call *colpa di sole*, the stroke of the sun, which otherwise gives instant death or madness.

the head of Patroclus. From this cause, and the violent fatigue that he had previously undergone, (for he had just before, in three several onsets, killed nine men in each) he must have been much exhausted; or, in Homer's phrase, ἱαφών, faint or stupified: and under all these circumstances, to avoid the intense heat, he might relieve himself, by throwing off some part of the heavy and cumbrous armour of the great Achilles: and in this situation Euphorbus might take the advantage to come behind him, wound him between the shoulders, and Hector might meet him in front, and give him an usual Homeric wound.

“ νεῖαλον ἔς κεφαλῶνα,” “ *extremum ad ventrem*, at the lower extremity of the belly;” but such was the vigour of the Hectorian arm, διὰ πρὸς δὲ χαλκὸν ἔλασσε, that he drove the steel, (that is the steeled point of the spear) quite thro' the body. This wound was inflicted with heroic force; and for reasons obvious to your penetration, may be announced to be speedily fatal, according to the strictest anatomical and physiological propriety.

Yours, &c.

NOTE to the READER.

☞ ALL the correspondence alluded to in the last letter is lost : and in the letters on modern neurology a weak attempt was made to prove, that the cerebrum, or the true brain, was the seat of intelligence, and supplied the nerves, that serve for the purpose of voluntary motion. That the cerebellum was the seat of life, and supplied those nerves that contributed to the animal and vital functions, and to involuntary motion. And likewise some conjectures were offered how far the several substances of the cerebrum and cerebellum, after they had joined and formed the medulla oblongata, and the spinal marrow, might or might not, be distinct in themselves, and still, in some measure, continue to perform their several offices.

LETTER

LETTER LXXX.

HOMERIC WOUNDS, &c.

SIR,

THERE is no end of the diversity of wounds in the Iliad; and I now refer you to a curious one, that I cannot say I thoroughly understand.—In the 13th book, Antilochus pierced Thöon in the back, as he turned himself round, — —

“ ἀπο’ δε φλὶβα πᾶσαν ἔκισεν,

ἢ ἴ’ ἀνα νῶτα θέσσα διαμπερὲς ἀνχεν’ ἰκανεῖ.

LITERALLY—

and cut off all the vein, which running continually by (or through) the back, reacheth to the neck.”—In the index to Pope’s translation, this said vein, (without any one reason assigned) is declared to be the spinal marrow.

I once said, that I had perused no note of any commentator, that endeavoured to explain the particular
situation

situation of any one wound ; I must here make an exception : for I have stumbled upon a remark in Spondanus' Latin commentaries on this very passage. The learned annotator says, that the vein here meant, is called cava, or dorfalis, arising from the liver, and passing thro' the diaphragm to the heart, and from thence to the neck : in the words of the original note, "*inde ad cervicem.*" Spondanus refers us to Aristotle for the description of this vein ; and seems to hint, that the Stagyrte in his explanations, refer to this very wound. I have read several passages of Aristotle's history of animals, and I am confident I never read such a comment on Homer : but there may be such an one, and most probably there is.

What shall we say to this learned note of Spondanus ; is it not in some measure, *ignotum per ignotius* ? Pray, does not the commentator confound a little the vena cava with the vena porta, when he mentions the liver ? Otherwise he carries on the vein accurately through the diaphragm to the heart. But in the latter part of the note, he describes the vena cava
descendens :

* On a perusal of Aristotle's history of animals, I find some what like the note alluded to by Spondanus.

descendens: was it then that the antients, (thro' their ignorance of anatomy) supposed the two veins to be one, and to pass thro' the heart, like two opposite lanes at a turnpike-gate, and that both united constitute one turnpike-road? I think upon the whole, that Homer must allude to some part or other, either of the ascending or descending vena cava: tho' it is a little singular that he does not mention any effusion of blood. But at all events, the interpretation of Pope or his friend, must be erroneous: because the hero, after receiving the wound, extended his hands, where he lay upon the ground, in supplication to his friends: whereas if his spinal marrow had been *all cut thro'*, he must have been in luck to have done this. Besides I think you will perceive that Homer could not mean the spinal marrow at any rate; if you refer to a wound in the 20th Iliad, where a warrior's head being struck off, together with the helmet, by a stroke of the broad-sword,

σφονδυλίων ἑκπαλθ, * μυελὸς αὐτῆς

“ the

* From μύω; which verb has several senses: but here it may be rendered *claudio*, to shut up; because μυελὸς, the marrow, is confined in the bones.

situation of any one wound ; I must here make an exception : for I have stumbled upon a remark in Spondanus' Latin commentaries on this very passage. The learned annotator says, that the vein here meant, is called cava, or dorsalis, arising from the liver, and passing thro' the diaphragm to the heart, and from thence to the neck : in the words of the original note, "*inde ad cervicem.*" Spondanus refers us to Aristotle for the description of this vein ; and seems to hint, that the Stagyrice in his explanations, refer to this very wound. I have read several passages of Aristotle's history of animals, and I am confident I never read such a comment on Homer : but there may be such an one, and most probably there is.

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descendens :

* On a perusal of Aristotle's history of animals, I find some what like the note alluded to by Spondanus.

descendens: was it then that the antients, (thro' their ignorance of anatomy) supposed the two veins to be one, and to pass thro' the heart, like two opposite lanes at a turnpike-gate, and that both united constitute one turnpike-road? I think upon the whole, that Homer must allude to some part or other, either of the ascending or descending vena cava: tho' it is a little singular that he does not mention any effusion of blood. But at all events, the interpretation of Pope or his friend, must be erroneous: because the hero, after receiving the wound, extended his hands, where he lay upon the ground, in supplication to his friends: whereas if his spinal marrow had been *all cut thro'*, he must have been in luck to have done this. Besides I think you will perceive that Homer could not mean the spinal marrow at any rate; if you refer to a wound in the 20th Iliad, where a warrior's head being struck off, together with the helmet, by a stroke of the broad-sword,

————— ————— * *μυελος* 'αυτε
σφονδυλίων 'εκπαλθ,

“ the

* From *μύω*; which verb has several senses: but here it may be rendered *claudo*, to shut up; because *μυελος*, the marrow, is confined in the bones.

“ the marrow sprung from the vertebræ.” This Deucalion here alluded to, had been previously wounded by the brazen point of a spear,

“ ἵνα τῇ σπινθῇ χυσι λεονίης
αἰχμῶνος.” —

“ where the tendons or ligaments of the elbow join;” and the point of the spear somehow (the poet does not specify in what manner) pierced thro’ the hand likewise. You will see by this that he was too well acquainted with the spinal marrow, and the vertebræ, (for he uses the scientific terms for both) to confound them with any vein. I cannot conclude this letter without observing, that poor Deucalion was upon the whole sufficiently wounded for any one man. What think you?

P. S. On perusing an old obsolete translation of Nicander, (a Greek poet and physician) into a kind of barbarous or Gothic French rhyme, by J. Grevin; I perceive, that author describes some of the Lucanian serpents: and I think, from his description, I can clearly solve the phænomenon of the amphibæna,* which he terms *le double-marcheur*, or *double-tetu*,

* ἀμφιστάνα from ἀμφίς and ἑἴνο, to go two ways; viz. backwards and forwards.

double-tetu, double-headed serpent: and this venemous animal is by Grevin said to be, "*tout d' une grosseur, ainsi que les vers de terre!*" To be of one size throughout, like earth-worms." It is likewise reported to have eyes and mouth very small: (viz. scarcely perceivable): no wonder therefore, that the antients, who were afraid to come near enough to see which end was head, and which was tail, made it a monster at once, with two heads and no tail at all! And they might suppose this *double marcheur*, as the French call him, to walk both backward and forward, (tho' it might not really do so) from the deception I have already mentioned: or perhaps the African earth-worm, (for such I believe it was, and venemous only from peculiarity of climate) might possibly enough be supposed to possess both a progressive and retrograde motion. Whilst I am writing this postscript, I am making an experiment, and find, that an English earth-worm, tho' it generally goes forward, can if it will, occasionally go backwards also: experience in this and in every thing else is the test of truth. However poets may feign, or historians and travellers may exaggerate, there is generally some truth at the bottom

tom of their assertions. If the marvellous effects attributed to the basilisk, be in any respect authentic; that serpent (or rather viper) must certainly be possessed of an electrical power, somewhat like the torpedo, but in a much greater and more fatal degree. Take one instance for the whole; we are told upon apparently good authority, that if a man travels on horseback near the den of a basilisk; and the king* of serpents but touches the horse, both the horse and the rider are struck dead immediately. If this fact be real, is it not an instance of electricity in its fullest extent?

* *In vacua regnat Basiliscus arena.*—LUCAN.

Galen has, (as far as I can find) given such an account of the fascinating look of this reptile, as would seem to give a sanction to the fashionable but ridiculous notion of animal magnetism!

LETTER

LETTER LXXXI.

HOMERIC WOUNDS, &c.

(20th ILIAD continued.)

SIR,

WE have here a kind of constellation of wounds, (as thick as stars in the milky way) which Achilles exhibits in his death-doing fury; and I shall endeavour to dispatch these said wounds and deaths as speedily as the implacable hero inflicted them.

“ — — — — — ὁ δὲ φασγάνῳ ἔλα καθ’ ἥπαρ,
 ἔκ δὲ οἱ ἥπαρ ὀλισθεν, ἄλ᾽ ἐ μέλαν αἷμα καὶ αὐτὸ
 κόλπον ἐνέπλησεν.

With the sword he (Achilles) so smote the liver, that the liver fell out; and *black* blood from it filled the bosom of the dying warrior.”—You, Sir, (who will perceive that the hepatic artery, the vena porta, and at least one branch of the vena cava ascendens, must have been divided) will feel the propriety of the

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fudden

sudden effusion of blood.—I remember that Van Swieten, the ingenious commentator on the learned Boerhaave, has, in some part of his commentaries, attempted to assign reasons, why the blood of heroes and athletes, should be of a black, or at least of a dark colour.—Enough of this—take a second flying wound.

He (Achilles) wounded Mulius,

“ δερὶ κατ’ ὕς, εἶθαρ δὲ ῥαῖος ἦλθ’ εἰς οἶον
αἰχὴν χαλκείην.

with a spear, on the ear, and the brazen point of the spear came out at the other ear.” This must have caused instant death; since either the medulla oblongata, or the medulla spinalis, (or both) must have been very much injured.

Take a third wound, without further ceremony; the aforesaid Achilles smote Echeclus on the middle of the head with a large sword,

“ πᾶν δ’ ὑπεθερμάνθη ξίφος αἰμάτι

and all the sword was warmed with blood.” As this wound appears to have been inflicted on the longitudinal or strait future of the scull; and as I believe

all the ramifications of the carotid arteries, divide into exceedingly small branches before they approach the brain; (begging Homer's pardon) I cannot conceive whence all the blood could proceed. Virgil's "*hæsta tehefacta cerebro*," is, (as I have already observed at large) a great improvement on this passage. And Pope, by translating Virgil instead of Homer; or rather, by copying Dryden's version of the *Æneid*, has, in my opinion, improved on the original.—Read and determine—

Warm in the brain the smoking weapon lies.—POPE.

And in the brain-pan warmly buried lay,—DRY. VIR.

Yours, &c.

LETTER LXXXII.

HOMERIC WOUNDS, &c.

SIR,

THERE is a tedious particularity in marking out each individual wound, and specifying the name of the warrior, who either gave or received it, which I intend in future to avoid: I must however beg to be indulged the liberty this once, as I shall refer you to a wound that, according to my judgment, is the most accurately described, respecting its consequence, of any in the whole Iliad. Mariones, in the 13th Book, smote Acamas with a spear,

“ αἰδοίων ἢ μεσηγυ καὶ ομφαλῷ, ἐνθα μάλιστα
 γίνεται Ἄρης ἀλεγεινός οὔρεσσι βροτοῖσιν·

between the navel and the groin; where a war-wound is the most grievous to miserable mortals.” And if any physiologist doubts the fact, let him consult those surgeons, who have performed what is called the high operation for the stone, or who have attempted to puncture the bladder above the *os pubis*, in order

order to relieve it, when over-distended with urine from a stricture in the urethra, or from any other cause.

Again, a wound in the eye is not mortal in itself, but when inflicted by a sharp instrument it generally proves so, from the socket's being pierced thro', and the brain injured. Homer has beautifully described such an effect in the 14th Iliad.

“ ——— ἔϊα καὶ ὀφθαλμοῖο θέμεθλα,
 εκ δε ὥσε γλένην, δόρυ δ' ὀφθαλμοῖο δια προ
 καὶ διὰ ἰνίς * ἦνθεν,

He, viz. Peneleus, inflicted a wound at the bottom of the socket of the eye, forced out the eye-ball, and the spear pierced thro' the orbit of the eye, and came out at the extremity of the hind part of the head.” This wound was given with unusual force, and must have been speedily fatal. Pray, does not Homer forget himself a little, in the hurry and impetuosity of his imagination, when he makes Peneleus strike off the head

* This word is evidently derived from *is*, (which some Lexicographers make to signify a “nerve”) and, properly speaking, means that part of the head which is joined to the neck. These Lexicographers say, it is called *ινίς*, because it contains *is*, a nerve: but I am decidedly of opinion, that the Greek primitive monosyllable, in its proper and unequivocal sense, signifies “fibre” only; and in metaphorical sense, means strength in general.

head of the poor wounded man with a broad-sword, in order to expedite and secure his death? And is not this, in Macbeth's phrase, "to make assurance doubly sure?"—Turn a little further back, in the same book, and you will find another death, exhibited with great propriety by a wound:

“ ——— καφ' ὧλης τε καὶ αὐχένος ἐν συνεοχμῷ
 νεῖαλον ἀσφαγᾶλον, ἀπο δ' ἄμφω κέρσε λένοντε,

where the head is articulated with the uppermost vertebra of the neck, and the two tendons, nerves, or ligaments, were cut thro." I know of no pair of tendons, nerves, or ligaments, that can be here alluded to with any sort of propriety: there is I believe in the first vertebra,* a transverse ligament, which keeps the axis in its place; and this interosseous ligament, for aught I know, may be by different anatomists divided into two or three different portions. And I should suppose that something of this sort was meant by ἄμφω λένοντε; but I wish to be favoured with your opinion upon it.

I beg to recall your attention once more back to
 the

* This vertebra is, by anatomists, called Atlas, because it supports the head, as Atlas did the globe of the earth, according to ancient fable.

the 13th book, and to submit to your consideration another wound on the right hip ;

“ — γλῦτον' κατὰ δεξιον, 'αὐλαρ' 'οἰσλος

'ανιχευ κατὰ κύστιν 'υπ' ὀστέον ἐξ' ἐπέρυσεν.

but the arrow passed out on the opposite side, thro' the bladder, under the bone.” The warrior who received this wound was retiring, and tho' Homer does not expressly say so, I apprehend his back was turned.

The arrow first pierced the glutæi muscles ; but under what bone did it enter ? Was it under the os sacrum, or os coccygis ? This wound however in its consequences is declared mortal with great propriety. There is another death almost in the same page ; “ ὑπὸ γναθμοῖο καὶ 'εἶλος ; under the jaw and the ear.” I have already in former letters assigned reasons, why speedy death must ensue.

Yours, &c.

LETTER

LETTER LXXXIII.

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE HEART.

SIR,

“*λάσιον* * *κῆρ*, the strong or vigorous heart.”

FROM this description, one would almost conclude, that Homer had known the true and genuine use of the noblest muscle; tho' I am pretty confident that he did not.—Pray, were you present at the dissection of the lion that died in the tower? If you were, you may easily conceive my meaning: for when I saw the heart of that bold animal, I immediately thought on the phrase of Homer, and of Shakespeare's “lion-hearted Richard;” the heart of the King of Beasts

* *λάσιον*, this word (if derived from *λαχνη*, *lanugo*, down, or short hair,) in its primitive sense, signifies hairy; and it may be literally so understood when applied to the breasts, *ἐλαθεσσιν λασοισι*, but as hairy men are generally strongest; the word, in a metaphorical sense, signifies strength, vigour, and sometimes courage: but I could rather wish to derive the word from *λα*, *valde*, very, and *σειῶ* *agito*, to agitate or put in motion.—Homer likewise uses the phrase *ᾄδιον κῆρ*, the dense heart. And history informs us that the heart of Leonidas, the famous Spartan, on opening his body, was found to be literally hairy; and the same is recorded of some others.

beasts being large, dense, and strong, in an amazing degree. Some Naturalists tell us, that the hearts of timid animals are the largest: perhaps they mean that the cavities of the heart in deer, hares, &c. are preternaturally distended, by the reflux blood being driven into them, thro' the frequent acts of fear and trembling. And it is remarkable, that in the *Iliad* Achilles insults Agamemnon, by telling him that he had the eyes of a dog, and the heart of a deer.

Man, the Lord of the creation, has no right I think to be called a timid animal; and man has as large an heart, and more brains, in proportion to his size, than any animal in nature. The elephant that was dissected some time ago is no exception; for tho' that "half-reasoning brute," as Pope styles him, had twelve pounds weight of brains; yet when we consider the immense bulk of the creature, it had not so large a quantity in proportion as one of the human species.

Again, a viper has, I believe, the least heart and largest liver of almost any animal; from which I conclude that it has less blood and more bile than any other: and I suspect that the apparent quantity of bile
contributes

contributes in a great measure to form the viperine virus.—An unexpected circumstance obliges me to break off abruptly.

Yours, &c.

LETTER LXXXIV.

CIRCULATION OF THE BLOOD.

SIR,

“ αἷμα—ῥέει ; The blood flowed.”

FROM this and several other phrases of a similar and stronger import, it is clear that Homer describes both wounded veins and arteries, as well as if he had understood the circulation of the blood: this he might do from observation only, and describe effects without knowing the causes. Which I do believe was the case. The antient Greek Physicians and Philosophers (Hippocrates, Aristotle, Plato, and Galen) knew that the blood moved in some manner, tho' they could not tell how. They looked upon
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the liver as its source, and seemed to think that it had an undulating motion.—Dr. W. Hunter was the only reader in anatomy whose lectures I ever attended; and he, I remember, told us, that one Grecian philosopher* in describing the motion of the blood, used the singular phrase of “*περιφερῆσαι*, that it was carried round about;” the periphery is the scientific term for the circumference of a circle. Therefore this phrase exactly expresses the modern notion of circulation: but I do not believe that the Philosopher had any just idea of this expression that he stumbled upon. If Homer had any faint idea that the blood circulated from the heart, thro’ the arteries, he must have learnt this doctrine from the Egyptian sages; for I do them the honour to believe, that as they possessed almost all knowledge; so obvious a discovery as the circulation of the blood could not well have escaped their notice. When the valuable library at Alexandria† was burnt by the Saracens, I look upon it as the greatest loss the learned world ever sustained: and if that misfortune had not happened; among the precious records of
oriental

† The old Egyptian language was almost totally in disuse; and most of the Egyptian manuscripts and records were destroyed, previously to the general literary conflagration at Alexandria.

* Plato

oriental science, it might perhaps have been found, that the knowledge of the circulation of the blood was a revival of antient knowledge and no new discovery. But of this more hereafter.

Yours, &c.

LETTER LXXXV.

ON

EGYPTIAN SCIENCE.

SIR,

YOU ask what reason I have to think that the circulation of the blood was known to the antient Egyptians? I will candidly tell you; In the first place, you must not judge of the old inhabitants of Egypt by the present, who are the most abject and degenerate set of mortals on the face of the earth: whereas their ancestors were every thing that was great and noble. They certainly discovered Geometry and Mathematics from a local necessity, in order to ascertain in some measure, the different degrees of the overflowing of the Nile. The Caldæans likewise, from the serenity of their sky, and the advantage of a tower at Babylon, that

that served for the purposes of an observatory, were the first that studied astronomy; as the Phoenicians were the inventors of letters, and perhaps of navigation. All these were in some measure neighbouring nations, and held constant correspondence and intercourse with each other; and they possessed all the arts and sciences of antiquity. In confirmation therefore of my former opinion, I think I have observed, that when Pythagoras first propagated in Greece the notion that the earth moved round the sun, and not the sun round the earth; it was almost immediately on his return from his travels in Egypt.— This speaks for itself. It appears therefore pretty clear, that the Egyptians entertained a true notion of the solar system, (as far at least as it related to the earth and the sun); and when we take into consideration that the science* of anatomy and practice of medicine, were first established in Egypt; I think it rather improbable, that such a sensible people should not, in some measure or other, have known so plain a fact as the circulation of the blood. I think that with regard to their several discoveries in

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* This is asserted on the authority of Manetho, a famous old Egyptian writer; and on the authority of some other authors.

the animal and natural world, Harvey, and Sir Isaac Newton, stand nearly in the same predicament; for Copernicus, in the 15th century, revived Pythagoras's notion of the solar system: but it was Newton who first found out the principles of attraction and repulsion, by which that system subsists. So, the motion of the blood in some measure or other was known to the ancient Grecians: and Servetus,* a Spaniard, (as Dr. W. Hunter has proved in his anatomical demonstrations) discovered half the circulation of the Blood, viz. thro' both lobes of the lungs, an hundred years before Harvey; tho' he first established the truth of the fact by indisputable proofs. Yet after all, I do not think Homer had any adequate knowledge of the blood's circulation; for if he had, as a poet, he certainly would have made some poetical use of such knowledge.

* It appears likewise, that Andreas Cefalpinus, an Italian, and Realdus Columbus, a native of Cremona, came very near to a knowledge of the circulation of the blood; since they both explained the contraction and dilation of the heart. And Columbus went still further, by shewing in some measure the uses of the valves of the heart.—It is likewise said, that Nemefius, a Bishop of some city of Phoenicia. (as early as the 4th century) went very near indeed towards a discovery of the circulation; since he proved that the pulse took its rise from the heart.

LETTER

LETTER LXXXVI.

ON THE

MALIGNANT ULCEROUS SORE THROAT.

“ καὶ τὰ ἐνὶ ὄσφιν καὶ ἡ γλῶσση, ἐκείναι αἱματωδὴ
 ᾖν.”

THUCYD.

“ — and inwardly the pharynx, and the tongue
 were soon bloody.”

SIR,

YOU have frequently hinted, that tho' according
 to the words of Lucretius, the malignant
 ulcerous sore throat was a leading symptom in the
 pestilence at Athens; you think Thucydides gives no
 sanction to the opinion:—read the above, and judge
 for yourself.—Thucydides was no physician, nor
 philosopher, but merely describes as an historian.
 Those bloody and sanious appearances in the throat,
 as there was no rupture of the vessels, give reason,
 I think, to conclude, that ulceration must soon take
 place, tho' the historian does not particularly mention
 it: the ulcers, therefore, tho' not mentioned, are

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clearly

clearly implied. Aretæus is, I believe, the first author who describes the malignant ulcerous fore throat with any degree of accuracy; and it is rather doubtful in what age he lived: I believe, however, it was in or soon after the reign of Nero. This incomparable author is likewise the first who makes a clear distinction between muscles, tendons, and nerves: and the latter, I think, he derives from the *σπον*, or the occiput.

On a re-perusal of Thucidides's much admired description of the pestilence at Athens; I find, that among other articles omitted by Lucretius, he remarks, that the year in which the pest invaded that city, was in other respects very *healthy; and that the few other maladies that did prevail, soon turned to the reigning one. And likewise, that as long as the disease was at the height, the bodies of the diseased did not waste, but resisted the tormenting symptoms beyond expectation. He likewise adds, (a circumstance omitted by most other Historians) that the same pestilence extended as far as the territories of the King: by which he must mean the large monarchy of Persia.

Yours, &c.

* The original word is *ἄνυστος*, derived from *α*, no, and *νστος*, disease, viz. diseaseless, or exempt from malady.

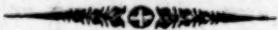
P. S. I think so lightly of my own hasty compositions, in comparison of the more approved writings of others, that I have hitherto neglected to answer your kind inquiries, respecting my two poetical attempts, the one satyric, and the other dramatic. You say, satire is my *forte*; I believe it is every one's, it being much easier to censure than to praise. My *chef d'œuvre* of that kind, The Devonshire Diaboliad, or, Satan's Tour into the West, has never yet appeared in print, and I believe never will. You say, I have therein immortalized a set of west-country scoundrels; I reply—any attempt that way is now unnecessary; as the hero, and some of the first personages, are so far advanced towards immortality that they have ceased to be mortal.

* The tragedy of Arviragus is not yet finished.

* This historical drama, since the first edition of these letters, has been printed (and after some corrections) was twice performed at the Exeter theatre, first by desire of the military, and secondly by order of the high sheriff for the county of Devon. Though the author has not interest enough to bring it forward at either of the London Theatres Royal.

EXETER, 24th April, 1798.

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